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HENRY HOLT & CO. NEW YORK

IX, 1900

MEN OF MARLOWE'S

BY

MRS. HENRY DUDENEY

AUTHOR OF "FOLLY CORNER," ETC.

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1900

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MEN OF MARLOWE'S.

INTRODUCTORY.

"As a woman in search of sensation, you should not have come to me. I can tell you tales, but they are not exactly sensational—hardly a detective in them."

"The detective is a slur on any story. He is merely the author's fool."

"But they are not even love stories of the kind you're accustomed to."

"Of course not. Here in an Inn of Court you have no opportunities—no conservatory, no ball-room, no garden parties. Gerald proposed to me on the Underground Railway—and deserved to be refused. But he had the grace to apologize."

"Well, I'll tell you all I know—or nearly. Some very droll things that I *could* tell would not interest you."

"I don't mind being startled. You promised not

to irritate me by being chivalrous. Chivalry! That subtle grip of the Middle Ages on my sex."

"But a woman—don't interrupt; I use the word in a superior sense—can never appreciate the fine humor of a tipsy man. She expects him to be obvious: to fall in the gutter, to be towed home by the policeman, or fined for being disorderly. Tales of buoyancy, funny from the man's point of view, would bore you."

"Humph!"

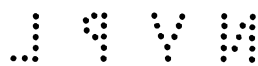
"There are other tales—quite of the feudal period—which Gerald would rather I did not tell. Merry tales, with an undercurrent of sadness: the most perfect form of humor."

"I hope you don't tax me with immodest prudery."

"I tax your husband. Some of the tales may be rather mad."

"Lunatics are the salt of the earth. Come and dine with us once a week. Tell me a story after dinner—Gerald goes to sleep."

"I must tell them in the Inn or they'd lose their flavor."



"Here! Once a week—that is settled. I'll come. Marlowe's Inn is charming. These quiet squares, just off Holborn; these sedate houses, with their old staircases and sets of chambers, each with its stout black door, appeal to me. I like the archway, the porter at the gate. I never saw such a green garden. I love rooks. Everything is gay, cool, monastic; a most fascinating place. And such queer people! I met a man with the face of a mystic——"

"Probably Guy Blockley, the comedian."

"There was another man with a striped waistcoat, closely cropped hair, and a bulldog jaw. He looked like a prizefighter."

"That's Paradale, the poet."

"Good Heavens! Then I met a woman, very fat. She carried a pail of dirty water. No doubt she was a political hostess, famous for her parties, or a popular lady novelist."

"She was only a charwoman—laundresses we call them in the Inn. She has probably 'seen better days.'"

"Well—about the tales?"

"Sad tales, remember—partly sad. But you'll get a laugh out of them."

"I prefer sad tales; there is more strength in a sob than in a giggle. Anything, so long as they are not commonplace. So long as the people don't marry in the last chapter. I'm so sick of sane, respectable people who do exactly what they ought to do. Gerald has a regular income—that blight on originality. I was doomed to middle-class ease from my very cradle."

"I wonder if you really *are* broad-minded. I wonder! You are not very young——"

"Nowadays a woman only comes of age at thirty."

"After thirty she is often a prude."

"But I am not so very much after. Why waste time in parrying? Tell me a story at once. Let this be the first sitting."

. . . . . .

"It was very stupid of me to clutch your arm like that—to scream. A scream is the admission of small intellect, of nerves, of everything that went out with smelling-bottles. But that noise startled

me—it was the prologue to your tale—too realistic. What was it? I think it came from that house across the way, from that open window on the third floor, with the blue window box."

"From No. 7. Yes; of course."

"How somber you look!"

"I must go and see what is up. Promise me to keep quite still. Don't even look out of the window."

"I promise. I'll look at the album instead. That is a most harmless, a most creditable thing to do. My heart thumps still. Do you think it's a suicide? I'd like a smelling-bottle, if you had one. But a drop of whisky is the modern substitute. Thank you. And in this little cup. How pretty!"

"It belonged to Kinsman. You will hear about him later. Here is the album. There are portraits of Adeline Pray and Minnie Chaytor—women whose acquaintance you'll make. I won't be long."

. . . . .

"What was it? Here, take the rest of the whisky; you look as if you wanted it."

"It was Dick Simpson. He's shot himself. Let me take you out and put you in a hansom. This is our first installment; a melodramatic one."

"Why did he shoot himself? How shocking! Love? There's a girl going in at the door now."

"Why? You will understand when I tell you about that set of chambers in which he lived. Poor Dick! He's left a note, just saying that all his accounts are in order. He was in the City; some of the men of Marlowe's are. The odd thing is—there is always a quip in our tragedies—that he had dressed for the occasion. Frock coat, flower in his buttonhole, new tie—he only bought it last night; showed it to me; asked if I admired the pattern. They'll never let that set again; it is the most extraordinary thing—that's the fifth man that *I* know of, counting Drummond and Jimmy.

"He was such a thrifty, cautious little chap, too! No debts, no difficult position. He wasn't hard up—as most of us are. He lived within his income."

"He seems to have been a commonplace person."

"Poor Dick! Here you are. Where shall I tell the man to drive to?"

"To the Circus. Good-by. I'll come again, about this time this day week. Poor man! How shocking!"

THE ONE IN RED.

ORION was mean. He gave a party once. The whisky was watered. He came to me confidentially in the course of the evening and whispered angrily:

"You see that fellow Pearson? My word! how he's helping himself to whisky. He's drinking it neat. I've watched him. Don't you call that confounded impudence?"

He was also one of those men whose brains never seem to develop; a weak-minded chap who, when he had his hair cut, allowed the barber to wheedle him into buying a bottle of hair wash—half a crown the small size, but only four-and-sixpence for one containing more than double. Brains! Men like that have only just enough to grub along with—just enough to see that they get their proper change across the counter, and are given the right brand of tobacco.

I knew a barmaid—a nice girl, without the least harm in her. I gave her flowers—a bangle once.

For some years she has been the mistress of a flourishing public-house off New Oxford Street; married a barman who had dropped in for a legacy. Doubtless by now she is the mother of an appallingly large family. Yet, whenever I met Orion, he used to snigger, bob his silly face forward, and chuckle:

"Well, old man, seen anything of Rosey lately? Fine girl, Rosey!"

I should have forgotten the girl's very name, but Orion would not let me. He always said the same thing.

One Christmas Eve I took her to his rooms—it was the only time he ever met her. He was sitting by a tremendous fire cooking a fine turkey. The table was set out most elaborately, with flowers, crackers, serviettes folded into shape.

We sat and chatted; he basting the bird, Rosey dimpling about with appetite. He told us how much he had paid for that turkey in Smithfield market, he showed us the sausages that were to be eaten with it. He went to the cupboard and brought out a very dainty tin of fancy biscuits. Rosey half put out her plump hand and then drew

it back awkwardly. He lifted the rice paper so that we might admire the sugar on the top row. He pointed out bottles of ginger wine, boxes of preserved fruit—all sorts of things. They made poor Rosey's blue eyes glisten. But he never offered her so much as a fig. What is more, I ascertained afterward, as a positive fact, that he never had a soul to dine with him that Christmas. That's the sort of fellow Orion was.

He had the third floor set at No. 7. We all wondered why he lived in the Inn at all. It held no advantages for him. His oak was never sported, except when he was out.

Perhaps you see nothing so very important, nothing, certainly, that is romantic, about that heavy black door on which my name stands white. But a man's oak guards faithfully the secrets of his life. Generations of secrets, of sins, of sorrows are held by those stout doors—black and inscrutable, two by two on every landing. The oak shuts out duns; shuts in a pretty woman. The stories those black doors could tell! I wonder they never crack—with laughter or great, splitting sobs.

The oak knows everything. It is like a fashionable woman's toilet. I love to hear them clang to somberly at night; when a man goes out, when he creeps in late. The oak is the bachelor's discreet parlor-maid. It says "not at home." When we sport it—which is simply shutting it—we defy the world.

Yet Orion only used this potential thing, this sacred and confidential black door, to protect his electro plate. He had no debts, no compromising visitors, no delicate difficulties. What a man! What a mean, drab life!

We all chaffed him about his electro plate; the box in which he kept macaroons, the fish slice, the sugar tongs—all the useless things. He really ought to have lived in a neat villa. No doubt he would have done if his aunt had not happened to live in Great Ormond Street, close by.

He took me to dine with her once. It was a wet Sunday. The aunt, Mrs. Grigg, was a terrible woman of seventy or so. She was dressed in the height of fashion—as it had been in the fifties. No doubt you have seen mold-spotted fashion plates of

the period. She had a muslin chemisette, muslin under-sleeves, a wide skirt of some blinding, bright red stuff. Great rings stretched the lobes of her ears. On her neck she wore string after string of jet and on her bony wrist a hair bracelet. Her brooch was set with braids of sandy hair. I suppose it was Grigg's.

How that ancient woman leered and bridled at me all through dinner! We had cold mutton and mint sauce, gooseberry tart and tapioca—cold water to drink. That leering, mincing meal! Those vapid gulps of plain water! There is nothing in this world more ghastly than the labored archness of an old coquette. For days afterward I never looked at a woman, except at my laundress—and they are hardly women.

Orion apologized for the water as we walked home.

"The old girl's stingy," he said with satisfaction. "But it suits me, my boy. When she kicks the bucket, I'm in for a good thing. And it can't be long, can it? What did you make of her? I don't like the way she wags her head about—paraly-

sis. She'll go off like a champagne cork some day."

"I suppose she will," I said wearily.

"Of course she will. She can't last long. She's over seventy, and she was a beauty once; you wouldn't think it."

I groaned, remembering those old eyes with red, lashless lids; that mouth with the infantile, pearly false teeth.

We crossed Lamb's Conduit Street. In Chapel Street, Wood, who was a decentish fellow and always in low water, had two back rooms on the second floor at No. 8.

"I'm going in here to get a whisky," I said, none too graciously, to Orion.

He put out his hand. His face, with the weak mouth and watery eyes, looked quite haggard in the moonlight which speared down into the narrow street. He bore a horrible family likeness to Mrs. Grigg.

Did I mention that he was a thin fellow? He had a straggling, straw-colored mustache and his skin matched it. Everything about him was ill-

hung and undecided. With his yellow face, yellow hair, fawn-colored overcoat and soft hat, he looked as if he had been just flipped into a weak solution of saffron and drawn out again. Why will fair men persist in wearing fawn?

"When she dies," he went on, "that house in Great Ormond Street will be mine; that and a snug bit—the old girl banks at Barclay's. She hasn't got a relation in the world but me. Some sort of second cousin of Grigg's used to live with her, but they rowed; she'd row with an archangel. I don't know where Clara Citron—that was the cousin's name—is now."

"Well, good-night, old fellow," I said.

"Wait a bit. You see property's going up at such a devil of a rate in Bloomsbury. The house alone will bring in a tidy income, let out in flats. I shall do it up and charge good rents and keep it select. Everything on the square, you know."

He gave his suggestive grin and dropped my hand. I wiped it mechanically as I pulled Wood's bell, and drummed on his knocker. The landlady kept me waiting; it was a trick she had. When at

last she opened the door she asked me acrimoniously:

"Aint the bell enough, but you must go playin' on the knocker and bringing a person's 'art into their mouths?"

A week later Orion came to my rooms. It was about nine in the evening—Saturday evening. I was just off to the "Oxford," and told him so. But he caught me by the sleeve and said feverishly:

"Haven't you heard?"

"What?"

"My aunt—Mrs. Grigg, you know. She—she's murdered."

He sat down in the saddlebag chair by the fire. Yes, the same saddlebag. That shabby old thing you are sitting in, with the fallen springs and the shiny mark of many fingers on the arms. Don't get up. I brought out the bottle and gave him a nip of whisky. He was shaking all over like a little clay-tinted marionette.

"Murdered!" I said, the vivid image of the old woman coming back. "Murdered!"

"Yes; just now." He made a gesture for more whisky.

The glass he held was dancing a jig in his hand. I noticed—it seemed an odd thing to notice at such a time—how clean his hands were. One does notice unimportant things.

"The old woman—her servant—has just come round to tell me," he continued. "Haven't you heard?"

"Heard! How could I?"

"I forgot. Of course you couldn't. It's enough to confuse a fellow, isn't it? Murdered!"

"Yes. But how?"

"I'm going to tell you. Is there any more whisky? Thanks. It is Saturday night and the servant had gone out to shop. She always shops late on Saturday—when she doesn't do it on Sunday morning. On Sunday morning in the Lane you can get a very decent fowl cheap. My aunt was left alone in Great Ormond Street. Am I making myself quite clear? She must have been cooking some mess over the dining-room fire; a pot had boiled over on the hob. She was stabbed—just

above the heart. Isn't it awful? Thanks, old man. It—it pulls me together. Come up to my place. The old woman's waiting. I don't know what to do first. She came straight to me. She—the other one, my aunt—is lying on the dining-room hearthrug. Well—thanks."

I followed him upstairs. Late as it was, one of the Inn laundresses—those travesties of women, all flesh, sacking apron, and dusty hair—was scrubbing the third floor flight. Saturday is the great day for stair scrubbing. She moved her pail for us to pass and looked at Orion's face curiously. As we went up we were followed by the rasping swish of her brush.

Mrs. Grigg's servant was waiting in the sitting room. She had seated herself. Orion did not seem to like this.

It was such a swell room—all varnish, gewgaws, and rose-colored lights. He had stuck squares of leather paper on the panels of the walls and put white porcelain finger plates painted with roses on the doors. He burned gas in the grate instead of coal—it was cleaner. It looked like an old maid's

room. I believe that he helped his laundress to clean it. She was a rather clean woman herself, who always wore a stiff bow of white muslin tied under her chin.

There was a shiny sideboard, on top of which was set out the electro plate. The looking-glass above the sideboard was cracked. Pearson, his nerves strung by the respectability and smugness of that room, had flung his glass at it on the night of the party—as a graceful return for watered whisky. Emily Higgins, a girl that Orion knew—she served in a fancy shop in Hampstead Road—had skillfully painted a cobweb and a trail of flowers across the crack. Orion never spoke to Pearson afterward.

"A fellow who will come into one's rooms and do a thing like that is a dirty cad," he would say in his thin, piping voice.

He was always saying it. He never said more than three things at the same period. He had attacks of sentences and worked them off. He said it every time you went to his set. He said it to all new acquaintances. He took them in to look at the

sideboard, and while they looked he enlarged on the rank villainy of Pearson. I actually waited for him to say it on that Saturday night. But he didn't. He only lifted the old woman's leg of mutton from the center table where she had set it. It was foreign meat and the blood had run out freely, pulping the newspaper and making a patch on the tablecloth. He carried it, with an air of reproof, to the cupboard and set it carefully on a dish.

The woman looked at him and then she looked at me. There was defiance and self-vindication and a lurking terror on her face. It was a long, horselike face, I remember. People of her class always look like that when anything suspicious occurs. She seemed to be saying in a terrified, insolent way:

"Don't you think I did it, because I didn't."

It is pathetic; this perpetual assertion of innocence—before they are accused—of such people.

"It give me such a orful turn!" she burst out at last, addressing herself to me, as Orion remained half in the cupboard, carefully putting a wire cover over the joint. "I've never been mixed up in no sich thing before. I've never been to prison. Not

me! Nor any of my relations. It's made my 'eart that bad—I suffers with the palpitations."

Orion remained in the cupboard, deaf to the hint.

"I come straight off to Mr. Rine," she went on. "I didn't even think to take the joint from under my arm. I'd only bin gone 'arf an hour down Tibbalds Row marketin' with another lady—'er as is 'ousekeeper in Chapel Street, where Mr. Wood lives. She could tell you the same. I'll take my Bible oath I wasn't more'n 'arf an hour. The larst place I was in was the fish shop at the corner of Devonshire Street."

"We'd better go to Great Ormond Street," I said to Orion.

The servant stood up, pulling her gray and black shawl closer round her throat. She gave a critical glance round the room before she left, and paid it her feminine tribute.

"You'll excuse me," she said, "but what a pretty room this is. Quite a doll's 'ouse, to be sure. I never see but one like it, and that was Mrs. Abraham's in North Street—'er whose 'usband was in the ready-made line."

It wouldn't interest you to hear the rest, but I have all the newspapers put aside if you would like to read the reports some day. The murder of Mrs. Grigg was one of London's many mysteries. There was no clew. The servant was able to clear herself conclusively of all suspicion. Scotland Yard was baffled. Ambitious journalists, with a taste for intrigue and interviewing, started wild theories, and there ended. Great Ormond Street was blocked with the crowd that gaped stolidly all day at the shabby house with the drawn blinds opposite the hospital.

Orion didn't go to the City. He was junior partner—so he said—in a shipping-house near London Bridge. He stayed at home in the jaunty room with the pink-tinted gas globes and drank all day. Orion was in a bad way. You might guess that when he drank whisky at three and something a bottle as if it had been water.

We'll skip the inquest and so on, and pass to the funeral.

Orion begged me to go, and I went. One couldn't refuse a poor, invertebrate, pleading fool

like that. His aunt's death had absolutely doubled him up.

There was the uncomfortable atmosphere of death about the place when we got there. I'll show you the particular house next time we are in Great Ormond Street. There is a narrow passage paneled to the ceiling with wood that is painted stone color. There is a sitting room to your left as you go in, and a flight of stairs ready to your feet at the end of the passage.

We went into the sitting room. There was a smeary decanter half full of thick port on the table. There were wine glasses and an uncut cake. Orion sat down. By and by we heard deprecating, creaking shoes coming downstairs, heard unctuous words of sympathy in the passage. Then we heard a woman's shrill voice—a sharp, short voice, like the keen snap of ice. Orion started.

"That's Clara Citron," he said in a frightened way.

She came in, a little middle-aged, shrewish-looking woman. She gave Orion her hand—it was thin and red and knuckly.

"I saw it in the papers," she said, without any circumlocution. "I came up from Southsea at once."

"I didn't know your address," he stammered feebly.

Mrs. Citron looked at him in a meaning way. She solemnly poured out three glasses of muddy port and cut three slices of cake.

"We must leave enough for the undertaker and his men," she said, measuring the bottle with her little alert eye. "Yes, I came at once. It was my duty. She was my relation, too, by marriage. And all the money was my cousin Grigg's."

The hearse and the one coach drew in at the curb. They threw an added shadow across the room where those two sat solemnly munching and sipping—the small, prim room with the putty-colored walls and the bits of fancywork, a sampler, mats, a beaded footstool—worked, no doubt, by Mrs. Grigg herself half a century before.

Clara Citron bustled up.

"The undertaker is such a very sympathetic man," she said, wiping the loose crumbs of cake

from her pale lips. "His wife's great-uncle, or his sister-in-law's great-uncle—I really forget which—was murdered in a similar way. He said he quite understood my feelings."

"The undertaker has always got somebody who died in a similar way," I said, with involuntary flippancy. "It is one of the business trappings; he brings it with the pall."

Clara Citron gave me a stony glance, and Orion stared at me entreatingly. He seemed afraid of offending her; he was afraid of everything and everyone.

"I don't know how we are going to get her downstairs," the business-like little woman said. "It is such an awkward turn on the landing. We could lower her out of the window, but there is such a crowd."

She peeped through the brown wire blind before she hurried away. Orion poured himself out a second glass of that deplorable port directly the door was shut on her and he dared. Every time there was a scrooping sound overhead he shook from head to foot. It seemed a long time before we heard the

cautious, thumping tread of men bearing a heavy load. At the ominous resting of those feet we both knew, although we said nothing, although we did not even look at each other, that they were maneuvering the turn at the landing. We both drew a breath of relief when the steady stumping went on again, came nearer, passed the door, went down the steps. A faint murmur floated up from the crowd. Orion had his third glass of port.

Clara Citron came in, a little flushed and triumphant. She poured out more wine in clean glasses, cut more cake, and beckoned the men in. When they were ready she coaxed on new black kid gloves.

"Come on," she said to us. "We are late as it is. Such a squeeze with that coffin at the head of the stairs! She was a fine woman. I want, if I can, to catch a late train back to Southsea. There are my lodgers to look after. I've only left the girl in charge."

"Do you keep a lodging house?" Orion asked mechanically, snatching up his hat with the deep black band.

"Yes," she said shortly; "I must do something."

We all three wedged into the passage. Orion was last. Clara Citron marched out, a compact, trim figure in cheap black, between the thin line of sickly London faces. She wore a solemn, festival sort of air. I followed, feeling very awkward and uncomfortable in the frock-coat I had borrowed from Wood: he got it out of pawn for the occasion. I never owned a frock coat in my life, and hope I never shall. It is one of those respectable, stultifying possessions that I refrain from on principle.

I looked back for Orion. He was wavering on the step, as if he felt afraid to walk between those lines of white faces which stretched from the door to the coach. Then I saw him give a hasty look into the house, at the passage, the stairs, muddy with so many feet. Then he seemed to come headlong to the coach. I thought he had slipped on something. He jumped in and banged the door furiously. The crowd gave a soft, sympathetic "boo" at the sight of his ghastly face. Clara Citron, who held a new handkerchief with a very wide border to her dry eyes, looked over the hem.

That terrible long drive to Finchley! That shim-

mering line of faces all the way! I went to Jimmy's funeral, I went to Chaytor's, and I went to Mrs. Grigg's—under protest. I will never go to another, unless it is my own—that will be unavoidable.

The Great Ormond Street murder made a tremendous sensation. I think Clara Citron thoroughly enjoyed herself. She seemed to regard the crowd in the light of a personal ovation.

Did I tell you that it was May?—a wet, warm May morning. At Finchley, away from the houses, the rain seemed to fall more softly. In the cemetery all sorts of pink and white and purple bushes were in bloom. They reminded me of my childhood; I was born in the country. The great, intensely green stretches of grass were hideously humped with graves. The soft, rushing rain seemed to make them greener every moment.

I forgot to mention that Clara Citron coolly took the whole of the seat facing the horses. It was the best position for seeing the people, and it allowed the people to have a good view of her. She spread her skirt out carefully and kept the handkerchief to her eyes, peering furtively all the time. Orion and I

sat as far back as we could on the cushions—those dusty, pluffy cushions which reeked of a thousand stale griefs. We tried to get beyond the range of those gimlet-like eyes which pointed in their hundreds, from the pavements. Once Orion said, in a queer, strained voice:

"For God's sake let me get out and walk."

A moment later, before Clara Citron could make any scandalized protest, he bent forward, pounced forward, in a quick, cunning way, as you would on an animal you wished to catch, and brought his hand down heavily on the cushions of the opposite seat. A cloud of dust rose up and choked our companion. When she had done spluttering, she asked him angrily why on earth he did it. He didn't answer. He only sat and stared, with dazed eyes, at the seat where she sat. Once he moaned and shivered. He was not looking at Clara Citron. He was looking past her, through her. He was like an imbecile. But what could one expect of a man who had drunk whisky as if it had been water for a week, and had wound up with funeral port from the grocer's?

The service was a trial to everyone but Clara Citron. She reveled in the crowd. I was never in such a rage in my life. Every slatternly woman was pointing and whispering. Orion's face was clammy and yellow, like the clay into which they lowered Mrs. Grigg. I watched them drop earth onto her coffin; watched them put away for ever that leer of hers, those old coquetries.

When everything was over we went quickly across the sodden, exquisitely green turf to the gravel. The crowd seemed to melt away; softly, with a gentle rustle, like the gurgling May rain. We were almost alone.

A warm, wet day in spring is perfect. The rain came finer and thicker every moment. It made a mysterious veil of gauze which dropped over the graveyard.

Halfway down the path Orion clutched my arm. It was the despairing mad clutch of a doomed man. He clutched my arm and looked hurriedly behind him.

We had reached the coach. The undertaker's men climbed to their box with an air of business.

Some sat on the roof of the hearse, their legs dangling jovially.

"We shall get back faster than we came," Clara Citron said, getting in and looking round, half in disappointment, because there was no longer such a crowd. "I'm dying for a cup of tea."

Orion leaped in and rattled to the door. I was beginning to be really anxious about him. We started off at a brisk trot, but the iron gates of the cemetery were hardly out of sight before he stumbled up with a fearful cry. The cemetery, I say, was hardly out of sight; we might still have seen the grave which held Mrs. Grigg and the mystery of her death. He gave that cry and put out his trembling hands to the door.

He saw what we could not see. He saw the door of the coach open easily, and saw the fourth mourner come in. She brushed by him silently—the one in red—to the vacant seat.

"I can't stay. I tell you I won't stay," he shrieked, and the sharp rattle of wheels and hoofs dulled the agony in his voice. "Don't you see her on the seat?"—he was speaking to Clara Citron.

"She has hardly left you room to sit. Those confounded crinolines take up so much room."

The lodging-house keeper gripped him firmly by the wrists, and forced him back to his seat. Her hands were strong with years of housework.

"I'm used to this sort of thing," she said aside to me; "my first-floor lodger has had D. T. twice. My lady in the parlors takes her drop. Her husband pays me well to look after her—but they get it at the grocer's as soap or candles, at the confectioner's and call it tea, at the draper's when they go shopping, and have it put on the bill as extras."

Orion rambled on.

"She is sitting next you. She followed us out of the house. I saw her come down the stairs. She rode with us all the way. She stood by her own grave—followed her own funeral. She looked across and grinned at me, the old witch, when they threw earth on the coffin. She has followed us back. She jostled me just now on the cemetery path, d——n her! She'd have had me down if I hadn't caught hold of Groome. She wanted to seal me up in that dirty yellow grave, as we tried to

seal her. But I could bear it. I wasn't going to let her frighten me. I bore everything until she came away from her own grave—then I knew it was all up with me. She is filling the coach. Can't you see her red dress puffing out? I never saw a woman swell so. The red dress, Groome; the dress she wore at dinner on Sunday week! The one she always wore in the evening, the one she died in. Oh! can't you two see her? Can't you turn her out? The coach is all growing red."

"Do you mean Mrs. Grigg?" Clara Citron asked crisply. "I can't see anything." She bounced to the other side as if to convince him. "But then," she added significantly, "I didn't murder her."

"You see, I did," Orion returned with a foolish smile and the tremendous simple relief of a child who gets something off his mind.

He did not seem to realize what the admission involved. He was evidently indifferent to everything but the one in red; the dead old woman in the blood-colored gown, who was slowly, slowly, but very surely, filling up the coach.

"I got so tired of waiting," he continued in a

confidential way, and we both bent close to catch every word, closing him in, as it seemed.

"She wouldn't part with a penny and she wouldn't die," he went on piteously. "What are you to do with a woman like that? I was on my beam ends. It is all the accursed City. I was afraid of getting out of a berth. When you get out of a berth you're done. I've been with the same firm fifteen years, and yet they were going to turn me off like a dog—the bookkeeper told me so."

He was laying himself quite bare. He dropped the flimsy lie of his daily life. He did not hold to the junior-partner fiction any longer.

"It was very easy," he added, with a certain workman-like pride in the affair. "I knew when the servant went out marketing; knew how long she'd be, and where she hid the street-door key—on a ledge near the coal cellar by the area steps. It was the easiest matter in the world. The old woman—keep her back, can't you? She doesn't want to hear—she knows. She was stooping over the fire—weren't you? She had been cutting up meat; the stew was on the hob and the carving knife

was on the table. I gave her one certain blow. She gave me one look—I might have known what that look meant.

"But I did it beautifully. I went back to my rooms and washed my hands and changed my cuffs, so as to be sure," he sniggered. "I had only just finished when the servant came round. It was a close shave. And then I went and told Groome. No one need ever have known. But you can't fight with a woman who comes out of her grave!

"She takes up so much room that I can't breathe. Let her out, shove her into the road. She'll never be able to catch us up. Let the wheels go over her."

Clara Citron, who had held his wrists firmly all the time, dropped them and cautiously opened the door of the coach a very little way. I twitched her skirt.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going to tell them to drive to the Old Bailey—that's Newgate, isn't it?" she returned viciously. Evidently she owed Orion some deep grudge.

"Pooh! We don't do it that way. Sit down.

Take up all the seat—try to convince him, to keep him quiet. I'll look after him to-night."

She sat down looking slightly sulky.

"I trust you to look after my interests," she said plaintively, after a pause. "I'm a hard-working woman and all the money was on my side of the family. Here's my card." She pulled out a thickly-lettered squab of cardboard. "'Citron, The Parade, Southsea.' If you ever want a blow of sea air, I can always let you have bed and breakfast on reasonable terms."

The coach swung merrily on. I rather fancy that the men on the box were singing. Orion kept on saying piteously that Mrs. Grigg, in the red dress, was taking up all the room—more and more room—that she was slowly strangling him. In this fashion we rattled back to Bloomsbury, where it was getting dusk and where rain fell more heavily than it had done in the morning.

I watched him all that night. In the morning the sun came fiercely in. The hot, golden air seemed all Sunday frocks, church bells, and the weighty caw of rooks.

There was a pane of glass above Orion's bedroom door. He said, quite quietly,—it was the first time he had spoken:

"She keeps on looking through that glass. There's a confounded red bonnet on her head now—never knew such a woman for red. Can't you do something? Can't you rig up a curtain, old chap?"

There was a crafty look on his silly face. I remembered that afterward. I turned aside to find something, and the next thing I knew was a "ploomp" on the stones underneath and a loud, ringing shriek.

Orion had flung himself out. It was really the best finish he could have made. Adeline saw him do it and shrieked. She was standing at Murphy's window; Orion, in his fluttering shirt, dropped past her startled eyes. I must tell you Adeline's story some day.

The money? That was the one funny touch in the whole affair. Mrs. Grigg actually left the house and every penny she had in the world to the man who brought her round two hundredweight of coal once a week, from the greengrocer's shop in Red

Lion Street. He was a handsome sort of chap—that seemed the only reason. He sold the house. I heard the other day that he was drinking himself to death.

Clara Citron? She went back to the lodging-house at Southsea; is there now, I suppose. But she was one of those women without attributes; not the sort of person you would have the least interest in investigating.

Hard on Orion, wasn't it? Quite superfluous, you see. I never liked him. Yet, looking back, I'm sorry for the mean little humbug. That cursed City grinds men down to any pettiness. I'd rather starve in Piccadilly than eat turtle in an Alderman's robe at Guildhall.

'ARNOLD'S LAUNDRESS.

THE laundress, as an institution, is dying out. Men are getting particular about their rooms; one across the way, that set where the cork window-boxes are, bought a feather broom last week. There is a very reprehensible feeling of respectability and decorum about. Most of the fellows have smart young women to clean their rooms. I see them tripping gingerly across the square in the mornings, with loose cotton blouses, curly hair, and artificial flowers in their big hats.

But the good old laundress, all fat and dirt and impudence, contents me. She has a draggled skirt with a deep hem of dried mud, a flat pancake of a bonnet, all melancholy jet and brown ribbon that once was black. She wobbles when she moves; she is a half-set jelly in a greasy bag. I like her; to me she recalls my youth, the old wild days when I and the others were young. With a few exceptions she is only employed to clean offices now.

She is a professional woman. For many years the care of certain sets descended quite naturally from mother to daughter. They were pocket boroughs—hereditary pickings. The tenant was a mere incident, to be borne with up to a certain point.

I remember that Arnold was always squabbling with his laundress. He was an assertive little chap, and understood nothing in the world but dogs. He had no sense of humor; resented Mrs. Neaves and asked me to mediate. I suggested an apology.

Mrs. Neaves was blue-eyed. She had a singularly flat, red nose.

"Me apologize to the likes of 'im!" she cried out in a pained voice. "Me! As 'ave cleaned that set for years. Why, I treats 'im worse than the dirt under my feet. Do you know what he did? 'E threatened to punch my nose."

"Come, come! Did he do it?"

"Did 'e do it! It 'ud a bin Gawd 'elp 'im if 'e 'ad. I'd a summonsed 'im," she cried as she flounced off.

After this Arnold went through many vicissi-

tudes; a new laundress every week. He was like a woman; took these things to heart. I shall never forget how pleased he was when he came to tell me that he'd got a treasure at last.

She was very smart; a rather supercilious young married woman, with long earrings and a pert, white face. She came to the Inn wearing black kid gloves and a silver locket and chain; she carried a little reticule with her apron rolled up tightly inside. Things went very well for a week. She kept the place spotless. But when Arnold paid her on Saturday afternoon, she asked him civilly to "suit himself."

"The work's far too heavy," she said mincingly, "and the rooms is invested with beadles to an awful extent. It's not as if I was obliged to work, you see, sir. I only do it to occupy my time—not having any children—and to help pay back the money my husband's mother lent him. There's no hurry for that. She's in a good position. Got her own laundry, paid seven hundred down for it. My husband was in the army, and she bought him out before we were married. I couldn't think of marrying

a soldier—all the refuge goes into the army. If only you could get a girl to come in and do the rough work for a hour every morning, my husband wouldn't object to me obliging you."

"What's a man to do?" Arnold asked dejectedly of me in the evening. "I'm half inclined to chuck the Inn and go back to diggings; the Common was good for the dog to run on. But then there's the landlady—she always objects to dogs. And some of them have principles—I call all principle prejudice—about the latch key."

"You'd better take back Mrs. Neaves. Give her a shilling a week more; that's all she was trying for. You'd save in the end. How many have you had altogether?"

He began to count on his fingers.

"There was Stubbs. She was right enough, but it makes me sick to look at a scarecrow. And old mother Morey who always turned up with bruises on Monday morning. And Mrs.—What's-her-name—the woman who brought a perambulator full of babies. By the way, have you heard about Wood? He's frightfully down on his luck. The

last thing he did was to steal the landlady's perambulator. When he got to the pawnbroker's the blessed thing wouldn't go through the door, so he had to wheel it back. And the Cox woman—oh! I forget their confounded names. They are all alike. Stay as long as it suits them. Rob you right and left. They take their money some Saturday and you never see them again. If they can swindle you out of sixpence or a shilling by pretending to have no change, but promising to bring it on Monday, they will. The last one—before this woman—had me that way. I was fool enough to give her half a sovereign. That was four bob to the bad, for her money was only six. Said she lived in Hand Court, over the old clothes shop. I've been down there and no one has ever heard of her. I went with Wood. He was going to sell some old trousers, but they only offered eighteenpence for two pairs, so he's pawned them and sold the ticket—it's a much better plan.

"There was the woman Sol flew at. He is the gentlest dog in the whole world. But you mustn't shake your fist at a deerhound; it puts their blood

up sooner than anything. I warned her, but she would do it. The husband came round half drunk and bullied. I gave him five shillings to get rid of him. They all object to the dog. It was because of the dog that I left my lodgings in Wilkinson Street, Tooting. And I'd rather throw stones at my grandmother than part with Sol. He saved my life. Did I ever tell you? It was when I was on a walking tour. I was alone on Dartmoor, except for Sol——"

"You've told me lots of times. Now, take my advice and have Mrs. Neaves back. She wasn't a bad sort."

"She was very kind to Sol; used to bring him an apron full of bones," he said reflectively.

When he said that, I knew the thing was settled and that Mrs. Neaves would be reinstated. He was devoted to Sol, who was a beautiful, pure-bred deerhound, with the long, melancholy face and almost human eyes which these dogs have.

Poor Arnold! I don't know what has become of him. But I can make a good guess. He's living somewhere in the suburbs, very near the Common—

for Sol's sake. He was a dapper little fellow. One of those men with a rather big head, neat calves, and a chain with a big seal. He wore loud check suits —four checks to the suit—when he went away on a holiday, and when he was at home he had an incorrigible habit of wasting his time at bars and chaffing the barmaid. That is nothing; every man is bachelor to the barmaid. But it led Arnold into complications.

Clarissa was an extraordinarily pretty girl. She had blue eyes set very far apart, and a striking profile. With her loose knot of hair, her delicate nose, and her short upper lip, she looked like a cameo—one of those pure, classic faces which middle-aged ladies used to wear in a brooch. Of course she was powdered, and she laced tightly and puffed her lovely hair out into one of those exaggerated erections which is the professional headgear of the barmaid. You never see such an arrangement anywhere else; perhaps the management provides it. But she was very lovely and demure. Also, she had the sense to be silent: an unusually pretty woman should never talk.

Arnold, who dropped into the "Worcester Arms" nightly, began to regard her as a woman—not merely a barmaid. Men sometimes talk dubiously to the barmaid, and she—figuratively speaking—ducks her head and lets the stream of insinuation flow over her. She is never affronted; takes it as a matter of course; customers pay for this privilege with their drinks.

Clarissa was lonely. She lived in a barracks somewhere off Greek Street, clubbing together with a lot of other young women. She never spoke of her relations. Arnold assumed that she was like so many other girls, alone in London—to sink or swim, according to her luck. He took her out and gave her harmless little treats whenever she could get away from the bar. But he never asked her to his rooms. He had a sort of reverence for her. He didn't wish to compromise her, and he took to glaring fiercely at any harmless simpleton who strolled into the "Worcester Arms" and chaffed Clarissa in the usual way.

He introduced her to Sol, telling her how the dog had saved his life on Dartmoor and adding that

nothing on this earth would induce him to part with the animal.

"He's a pure-bred blue deerhound," he wound up enthusiastically. "I've got his pedigree for seven generations."

Clarissa said "really" in her demure way, and she stroked the thing's wiry coat and said what beautiful eyes he had, and that she supposed he must be worth a lot of money.

"Twenty pounds—I've been offered that," Arnold told her concisely. "It was a fellow who shows these dogs. He's got a whole kennel of them at his place in the country. I went down there; you never saw a more beautiful sight."

"Twenty pounds!" said Clarissa, drawing in her breath softly.

Things went on for a month or two. Then Arnold became more infatuated than ever. He asked Clarissa to marry him. Of course she jumped at it. The great ambition of these girls is to marry a gentleman. And Arnold would pass—with a barmaid. He was fairly well off, too, making, so he said, about six hundred a year on the Stock Exchange; it is al-

ways these stupid men who make money. It was a catch for Clarissa.

He took her away from the "Worcester Arms" and boarded her out with a decayed widowed lady at Clapham. He made an arrangement for Sol to board there too, and Clarissa promised to take the dog for long rambles on the Common while his master was in the City.

After this the Inn did not see very much of Arnold. He used to go straight from the City to the suburbs—rushing to catch a particular train and joining the general exodus at Clapham Junction. Thousands of fellows do that; it would kill me. But he really liked it. He was always hankering after the suburbs; said the air was pure; told you vaingloriously that no one could ever build on the Common—it was sacred to the people. You know the way these people talk; the people who live in smart houses all red and white—the ideas of the suburban builder never go beyond a colored peppermint stick—fellows who work and sweat in back gardens the size of a tablecloth and go to the local theater.

Arnold used to have supper with Clarissa and the widowed lady—his ideas with regard to the girl were ludicrously proper ones. After supper he and she would be alone more or less for an hour or two, with Sol spread at their feet. Arnold would talk dogs, and Clarissa would look lovely and throw in a simper now and then. At ten he left: the widow lady liked to be in bed by half-past.

It was about this time that he took to criticising Mrs. Neaves. He found himself constantly watching her, speculating on her. Once, when he went into the kitchen on a Saturday afternoon to wash out an ink pot, he noticed how white her fat neck was. She was cleaning the lid of a tin saucepan with a bit of emery paper. Her head was bent and her fist circled energetically. Her face was streaming with perspiration and her flat toper's nose glowed like a poppy. Her bodice was open at the throat, and he saw that her neck, beneath the line of exposure, was delicately fine. It reminded him of Clarissa's milky skin. He stood swilling out the ink pot, taking more pains than was necessary and staring at fat, frowsy Mrs. Neaves and wondering

how she would look with a finely-chiseled nose in place of the comical, red, flat one, which seemed to have been roughly trodden into her face by a careless foot. She looked up at him rather curiously, rather resentfully—evidently suspecting that he was spying on her. He noticed that her blue eyes were pensive, not twinkling. It was absurd to think of Clarissa in connection with that dirty, gin-drinking woman—her face all coarse rolls of flesh, her dress gaping, and her greasy bonnet-strings streaming back from her triple chin. Yet, when he went to Clapham that night, he amused himself by trying to fit Clarissa with a flat, blossom-like nose. And he was prepared to swear that her blue eyes were twin eyes to those pensive ones which were set in the laundress' head.

He couldn't for the life of him help watching Mrs. Neaves—in every attitude. He watched her as she rubbed the brush across his boots, swinging her big arm easily from the shoulder; as she knelt on the rug to coax the fire, her great, spread body bunched out and her pouch-like cheeks inflated. And in the evening when he sat in the widow's

house he used to compare her with that porcelain slip of a girl Clarissa. At fifty—Mrs. Neaves couldn't be more—would Clarissa have such haunches, such pendulous cheeks!

He idealized the laundress—quite unconsciously; he was the most matter-of-fact little chap in the world. Yet, in spite of himself, he became imaginative, degenerate. He took to engaging Mrs. Neaves in long conversations—about the lady at the cats'-meat shop in Red Lion Passage, who had just given birth to twins, and whose husband was doing three months for stamping on her ("a nice beast," as Mrs. Neaves said righteously); about the other lady who got mad drunk regularly every Saturday night and threw all the household china out of the window—about anything, or anyone, for the mere sake of seeing her talk, of watching the changes on her coarse face, and the quick movement of her mouth, which could only boast three front teeth.

Every wrinkle, every deeply-scored line on that woman's face, every watery light in her blue eyes, meant to Arnold the track of some youthful charm.

Was Mrs. Neaves like Clarissa at eighteen? Would Clarissa be like Mrs. Neaves at fifty? I really think that he would have ended by marrying Mrs. Neaves, out of pure, involuntary fascination, if Clarissa had not been a woman and inquisitive.

She kept bothering him to take her to see his rooms. He was to leave them very soon, had sublet them to another man. He had taken a house at Clapham, a stone's throw from the Common, and with a back garden a little bigger than usual—but only for Sol's sake, Clarissa said. It was the first time she had shown a tinge of rebellion.

"A great dog like that will make an awful mess in a nice house with his dirty feet. Can't you keep him chained up?"

"Chain a deerhound!" cried Arnold, in holy horror. Sol was a religion to him. "You'd spoil his legs."

He arranged to bring Clarissa up to the Inn some Saturday afternoon. She was to have tea with him in his rooms, and go out to dine somewhere afterward. He gave Mrs. Neaves an extra shilling to stay late and get the tea. At least, he said it was

to get tea; he tried to persuade himself that it was to get tea; but I'm certain that his real reason for keeping her was his odd desire to see those two together, to compare notes. He said to her with deprecating apology—she was the sort of voluble, violent woman to compel respect from a man of his character:

"I've a young lady coming here this afternoon to tea; the young lady—hum, hum—that I am going to marry. Can you stay a couple of hours later? I'll make it worth your while."

Mrs. Neaves said condescendingly that she'd come back in time to get the tray ready, after she'd "done for the gent at 6." As for Arnold's remark about marrying the young lady visitor, no doubt she put her own valuation on it—being seasoned to remarks of that sort from giddy tenants. The laundress is a true skeptic. She does not believe in married couples in the Inn—this land of ephemeral affections—doesn't approve of them. I knew a sensitive fellow who had his marriage certificate framed and hung up in the sitting room.

At four o'clock Arnold and Clarissa came in.

Mrs. Neaves had just arrived. She was in a state of much disorder, as a protest against Clarissa. There was a warm, sour smell of dishwater; a dustpan half full of flue tripped Arnold up on the threshold.

"This is my bedroom," he said to Clarissa. "And that is my sitting room. And here's a little den for Sol—he's allowed to have bones there—and there's the kitchen."

"Oh! that's the kitchen."

Clarissa looked in and Mrs. Neaves looked up.

"I'll go and take my hat off," the girl said suddenly, slipping in at the open bedroom door—it was exactly opposite the kitchen.

Arnold went into the sitting room at the end of the passage. There was a cupboard. He used it as a hanging closet. At the back of this cupboard there was a tiny window which looked into the kitchen. The sets are full of oddities, surprises like that; windows, ledges, steps, in the most unlikely places.

Some sets have a dunscope. It is a little grating, opening out of a cupboard in the passage.

You steal into the cupboard, shut the door, and peep onto the staircase. The same idea is carried out in places where polite people live. In that case it is a looking-glass which reflects into the dining room the figure of the caller on the door-step. When people have a good balance at the bank, and no particular skeleton, the idea is snobbish; when a man in the Inn hasn't a penny it is pathetic. He looks out, sees his washerwoman, the tax collector, the man who lent him a fiver—and keeps the oak rigorously sported.

The dunscope was often used by industrious students, who looked out to see if the visitor would be helpful to their studies or the reverse.

No doubt the man who put in that little window at the back of Arnold's cupboard chuckled as he did it—recognizing that it also had dramatic possibilities.

Where was I? Oh! Arnold was changing his coat. As he felt for the loop at the neck, he heard someone say softly—it was a whisper of terrified recognition:

"Mother!"

Then he heard another voice, which seemed to come thickly through layers of flesh.

"Law! Then it reely *is* you, Clara."

That was all. But you'll admit that the square, dusty window at the back of the cupboard had justified its existence—doubtless not for the first time, if the paneled walls had been capable of crying out.

Arnold put his eye cautiously to that dim pane of glass. He saw Clarissa in her spring finery; dainty, fresh, from the jaunty little lace hat, with the trembling cornflowers, which was perched on her elaborately dressed hair, to the pointed, shiny shoe sticking out from the frill of her skirt. He saw her beautiful, classic face; her blue eyes, a trifle frightened and guilty and disgusted, but not in the least affectionate. He saw her frown and make a warning movement with her gloved fingers and jerk her head toward the sitting room.

Mrs. Neaves had her dirty hands on her spread hips; her dreadful working dress of brownish-gray wool was slopped with dish water and patched with grease. It had parted from its lining under the arms, at the waist, at the back—everywhere, as her

exuberant rolls of flesh broke through. She wasn't a woman; she was an unsavory bundle of rags which you would take gingerly by one corner and pitch onto a dust heap. And she was Clarissa's mother. The likeness was unmistakable, even if he had not heard the girl's quick, frightened word, which gave away the situation. He understood now the uncanny attraction which had lately impelled him to observe Mrs. Neaves. The two pairs of blue eyes, one looking out from a delicate frame of chalk, the other from a shiny band of perspiration, were the same. One pair a little bleared by gin, by labor and years—but that was the only difference.

He didn't catch the rest of their conversation; he did not want to. He watched them; their gestures (Clarissa's tragic, the mother's amazed) were enough. He sneaked away from the cupboard at last and sat down by the window. Sol, understanding, put his damp nose into his master's loosely doubled palm. His brown eyes said wistfully, "I could have told you so. Why want a woman? Isn't my devotion enough?"

Arnold wasn't angry with Clarissa, wasn't con-

temptuous of her. He didn't see the humor of the situation, nor the degradation of it. He didn't want to put on his hat and get out of the place, leaving the women to squabble over him as they liked. He had none of the sensations that I should have had, that you would have had if you were a man. I know your womanly sensations; boiling wrath and contempt for Clarissa, mingled with intense sympathy and a little irritation with her for being fool enough to give away everything by that one nervous word.

He felt, as every sensible man would, that it was not her fault; the poor girl could not help having a dirty trull of a mother. He rather admired her for her independence. He saw the whole thing; the natural transition from Clara Neaves to Clarissa Eve, the genteel tastes instilled by the board school and kept up by the dainty dressing insisted on by the bar. Two rooms in North Street off Theobalds Road, gin and onions for supper, fist fights with other lady lodgers on the smallest pretext, frequent black eyes, noisy troops of dirty children—all the things which were part of her mother's daily life—

would speedily become intolerable to the daughter. He thought it very creditable in Clarissa to have thrown the old woman overboard. And he sat and waited patiently for Clarissa to come in, stroking the deerhound's long head and giving affectionate looks back to those sad, brown eyes. Clarissa entered. Almost immediately behind her came Mrs. Neaves with the tray. Arnold pulled the deerhound's ears rather nervously and looked at the two women. Clarissa was as cool as an ice pail; she seemed to sit a little more upright than usual, seemed to display her left hand with the engagement ring blazing on it—nothing more. The way in which she said:

"Thank you. I shall want a little more milk," to her mother, was superb.

Mrs. Neaves had made no attempt to dress for the occasion; she hadn't even taken off the sacking apron which was strained tightly across her big waist; her down-at-heel shoes went flip-flap as she crossed the room. Both Arnold and Clarissa could see, as the hem of the skirt kicked up, a circle of discolored skin where the stocking was torn. But

Clarissa's face remained cold and unmoved, like the cameo, as usual. Her expression rarely altered. She was the most apathetic, the most impenetrable-looking girl in the world. Her cheeks had never flushed and her eye had never faltered when men in the bar made doubtful remarks; she never flushed nor faltered now, with her poor, degraded old mother's bare heel under her eyes.

"You needn't wait, Mrs. Neaves," said Arnold, as Clarissa, with a charming young-matron air, began to pour out tea.

Then he remembered that he hadn't paid her, and feeling very uncomfortable he put his hand in his pocket, brought out a loose heap of gold and silver, and dropped eight shillings in the moist palm. He hated to pay her before her daughter. But he hesitated at going outside the door with her and doing it there, for fear Clarissa should take fright and think he had found out. But Clarissa never lifted her white lids. She only said, with an airy laugh and the milk jug poised affectedly from her dainty wrist with the jangling bangle, "Milk?"

"Thank you, sir."

Mrs. Neaves bent her head to count the shillings and he saw again the line of pure, fair flesh below the collar of her bodice.

"Good-afternoon, sir. Good-afternoon, miss."

She scuttled away. Clarissa mumbled a very haughty and patronizing "*Good*-afternoon."

Of course Arnold knew that he must do something. He couldn't have his wife's mother working in the Inn. She must be provided for. He thought of many things; a cottage in the country, a little business—something genteel in the sweetstuff and tobacco way, an almshouse, a home for incurables.

"For she is incurable," he remarked next day. "She was as drunk as Chloe for three days running last week. I wouldn't have Clarissa know I knew for a fortune. I wouldn't hurt a fly if I could help it, Groome. But if someone would take Mrs. Neaves out in a pleasure boat on Sunday, or for an excursion down to Southend, or—you know accidents do happen. Don't you think you might take her down to Epping Forest and lose her? Or Regent's Canal with a brick round her——"

"Don't be a fool. There's only one way out, and that is to give up Clarissa. A girl who would treat her mother like that——"

"If I had a mother like that I'd choke her," he said violently.

Then, cooling down, he added, digging the ash out of his pipe with a scrooping scrape of the pocket knife:

"The thing would be a country cottage. When people get old, nature is soothing to them. She could keep a pig and a few hens."

"She wouldn't stay there a week. You are making a tremendous trouble out of a trifle. Ask her. Find out what she wants and give it her."

"That's not a bad idea. I never thought of it."

He went back to his set. Mrs. Neaves was making his bed. She was looking very heavy after her three-days' indulgence. Her black eye had reached the green-and-purple stage. It was a lovely color study. Arnold, who was a kind-hearted little chap, felt sorry for her. Perhaps it was grief that had made her get drunk. He sat down on the window

ledge and stared at her thoughtfully as she doubled down to tuck in the blanket.

"What do you think of doing when you get old?" he asked carelessly. "Charring is hard work, I should say."

She stopped bed-making, put her hands on her hips,—it was her favorite conversational attitude,—and looked at him plaintively.

"The workus, I s'pose," she said tersely. "Now, if I could get that five 'underd pound the perlice is offerin', it's visitin' yer I'd be, an' not doin' yer dirty work."

"Five hundred pounds?"

"Five 'underd pound. Arf that 'ud make a lady of me. I was a lady born and bred; my father 'ad a jeweler's business in the Strand. But we none of us knows what we may come to. Five 'underd pound for information as 'ull lead to the conviction of——"

"Oh, yes, I know. The Hackney Wick murderer. But you'll never get him. He committed suicide, there's very little doubt about that."

"Aint there, now? The mean 'ound! And five

'underd pound 'angin' on it—which would 'a' bin a godsend to many a poor person. To think of 'im a-skulkin' off in that 'ole-and-corner way, with five 'underd pound on 'im."

"What would you like to set you up in life, supposing you had the chance of choosing?" Arnold persisted.

She thought a little. Then she said longingly:

"There's a nice shirt-and-collar business goin' cheap in the Lane—Leather Lane. The laidy's got a young family and can't see to the laundry. Fifty pound 'ud buy it. An' I'm used to clear starchin'."

Arnold was delighted at being let off so lightly. He said, trying hard to smooth the complacent grin from his face, and lying glibly, as we all can in emergency:

"I've always had a great regard for you, Mrs. Neaves. You've done my work well, and you've been very good to Sol. I'm going to be married shortly, as I told you——"

"Yes, sir. And how's the young lady, sir? if I make so bold."

"The young lady is very well, thank you," he

returned with hurried stiffness. "I should like to see you settled in a comfortable little business of your own before I leave the Inn. And if fifty pounds will buy the shirt-and-collar business, I shall be very pleased to make you a present of it."

When she had a little recovered from her astonishment, she gasped out:

"Thank you, sir, thank you kindly, I'm sure. I'll do the same for you some day; one good turn deserves another, don't it? An' I'll be proud to do your collars and cuffs for sixpence a dozen; the usual price bein' a shillin'."

That night Arnold went down to Clapham in the best of spirits. As he put it to himself triumphantly, he had saved a couple of hundred pounds and more, for he had quite reckoned on ten shillings a week at least, and these drunken old women live forever. Clarissa was on the platform. She ran up to him, through the hustle of weary-looking City men with tall hats and evening newspapers.

"Sol's gone!" she burst out hysterically. "I took him for a run on the Common. I let him off the lead when we got to the water—you always told

me to. And I—I missed him. They run so fast, those deerhounds, don't they? There were a couple of roughs a little way back. I heard them say what a beauty he was."

You may imagine what a blow this was to Arnold; Sol was a great deal more to him than Clarissa was. Clarissa had never been a woman; she was a barmaid at first and a pretty face afterward. But Sol had been his companion for ten years. Sol had saved his life. All the salt was off his palate; his daily life was dull, without savor.

He left off going to Clapham; Clarissa must have had a dull time. Whenever she hinted at marriage, he put her off peevishly.

"She never cared for Sol," he said sadly. "She wanted to chain him up. Women haven't got brains enough to appreciate a good dog."

He was very miserable. He hadn't even got Mrs. Neaves to bully and to study. She was settled in the Lane and deep in the shirt-and-collar business. His new laundress helped herself to the whisky and took away his loaves of bread and his rolls of fresh butter.

Of course he kept in touch with Clarissa, wrote her polite letters, and went down to Clapham occasionally. One Sunday afternoon he was walking across the Common. He went to Clapham partly by omnibus and partly on his legs; he no longer flustered to catch a particular train.

Do you know these suburban commons? They are most melancholy. One feels really grateful to the jerry builder for creeping up so closely to them, as closely as he dares. No doubt they are lungs for the people—but that is not a particularly interesting point. The people! They play cricket on the Common, leaving it bare in patches, like a giant head beset by a parasite. They throw paper on it; screws of paper, fluttering ends of paper, strips of orange peel, empty bottles. The Common! It is sacred to the people. No builder will ever be allowed to devirginate it. Arnold was fond of talking like that. He used to swell out proudly when he said it, as if that stretch of sad brown grass and cracking earth belonged to him. The sanctity of the people! Preserve me from it! Give me the

stately gardens of the Inn, with elms, rooks, the terrace, and memories.

Well, he was walking on the Common, sorrowfully and slowly, not caring a rush whether Clarissa was waiting for him or not. Suddenly he saw a long, grayish-blue something shoot straight toward him like an arrow. Have you seen these deerhounds run? Head down, paws out—it is a charming sight. Arnold very nearly infected me with his enthusiasm for Sol. Yes, it was Sol. He kept bounding shoulder high on his master, breaking over him like a wave. Sol! Arnold—soft-hearted little chap—never denied that a lump came into his throat and left him standing dizzy on the Common. But he was collected enough to grab Sol's collar—not at all a necessary precaution, as he ought to have known. The beast would have gone straight for the throat of anyone who tried to take him from the master that he had just found.

A rough-looking customer with a hoarse voice and a voluminous yellow neckerchief came up and began to be abusive, in the most picturesque language

Have you guessed? Clarissa sold Sol. Sold him for five pounds, with which to bribe her mother. Mrs. Neaves, who was most accommodating, took it with the shirt-and-collar business. Clarissa's beauty brought the old woman luck.

"A good-looking gal she wur," said the thick-voiced man. "Brought him down to my place in the Borough and I give 'er five quid."

Arnold was fifty-five pounds and a wife to the bad. But he got his dog back.

Clarissa! She hadn't wasted her time. When Arnold threw her over she promptly married another fellow—a City man; in the wholesale fruit way, I fancy. He had lodged next door to the widow lady, and those back gardens offer opportunities.

Arnold went on a six-weeks' walking tour, for Sol's sake.

"They haven't been giving him half enough exercise," he said indignantly. "These pure-bred deerhounds get paralyzed in the hind legs if they don't get enough exercise."

WHY?

I SAID I would tell you the story of Adeline. You remember that she saw Orion fling himself out of the window.

Her story is in two parts. You will wonder how it is that I know both sides. It is because I met James Pray and got to know him very well soon after his wife died. He put Betty to boarding-school, let the cottage furnished, came back to London, and lived in the Inn until he married again.

His second wife is an artist too—a very sensible, capable woman—with mediocre pictures on the line and accounts of her artistic At Homes in the leading fashion papers. She keeps Pray well in hand. He is a successful portrait painter—of the third-rate sort. They live in Kensington. I go to see them sometimes.

When first he came to the Inn he used to talk to me incessantly of Adeline. Oddly enough, it was Murphy's old set he took. He talked to me about

Adeline. I used to listen—with my tongue in my cheek. Sometimes it really seemed a little uncanny, and I had half a mind to tell him everything, and so quiet him. But Adeline, poor dead girl, was always begging me not to. He was forever asking—why, why? I could have told him. The very room could have told him. We sat and smoked and drank and talked—at least he talked—in that paneled room which some former fool had grained to imitate maple. The ghosts of Murphy and of Adeline—a guilty pair—seemed to glide between us and stand shadowy in the clouds of tobacco as poor Pray asked—why?

The very wood on the walls could have told him, the very oak, that black, discreet door which holds so much, was pregnant with an answer to that mournful query of his—why, why?

He talked of Adeline. He painted a nervous, evanescent creature, full of moods and always plaintively tender. It was not the Adeline I remembered. She had been fine, full, and strong, with steady gray eyes and skin of ivory, all health and life and fun and witchery and wicked daring. Though I never

saw so very much of her. She was a lady, you understand; Murphy usually sported his oak when she came. He only asked me once to dinner, and I thought her most charming.

. . . . .

"PRAY.—Adeline, wife of James Pray."

"If anything should happen, if I should die first," she said—"and you needn't frown, because one of us must be first—you'll put that in the paper."

She spoke dreamily, staring in front of her at the driving rain and the dripping trees.

"Rubbish!" Pray said briefly.

"Of course. To announce one's death, or birth, or marriage in the paper is to avow one's self commonplace—to brand one's self commonplace through all eternity, the eternity of the penny press."

She laughed and added wistfully:

"I'd love to be commonplace, just for once. It wouldn't go against your convictions to let me be commonplace when I was dead. If one does die! I shall come back every spring. When everything is bursting with life, how could I be expected to lie

still? Ah! I wish you were not so uncomfortably original. I'd like to be like other people."

"Other people being—the majority, that is——"

"Fools! Yes, I know. I agree. I'm a good wife. I take my color from my husband. But I do not think you sufficiently appreciate the tremendous importance of fools. They rule the world, with a very few exceptions. There is one born every minute. Think of that! And yet you ignore this vast army. It is created for the comfort, the convenience of the occasional wise man. But you are not wise. You do nothing for the fool. You won't even paint pictures for him to hang on his wall; that is why we are so hard up. The fool does not want your mystic, impressionist pictures; they worry and irritate him. Never mind. Be sure you put it in the paper—Adeline, wife of James Pray."

"Jump up from the grass," he cried sharply—the sharpness with which husbands of some years' standing veil concern—"and don't talk nonsense. You'll take cold."

"Pooh! What is health to a new spring gown?

That sounds like a patent-medicine query—inverted," she said idly.

They had been to the river to gather flowering rushes, and had been caught in a shower. It was a wet summer, one of those years when you hear the continual soft rushing of rain and when the plants in the garden go to luxuriant leaf. She sat under the tree. She had taken off her hat and was holding it carefully in her lap. She had pulled the skirt of her gown over her bodice and held it, lining outward, round her head and shoulders. Her knees were drawn to her chin, and her chin rested in the scooped hollows of her hands.

"These queer colors that you like run dreadfully," she complained.

"Why did you wear a new dress on a threatening afternoon?"

"Because it is Bank Holiday. I have an ineradicable Bank Holiday instinct for new clothes and an outing. This dress will be spoiled. I'd like a navy-blue serge coat and skirt—you'd never permit it. Blue serge—especially when it is touched up with cardinal—sounds so safe, so sane; it seems

to shout of all the good, thrifty, respectable women who do their duty. Blue serge and a sailor hat!"

James Pray looked down at her tenderly and yet with a masculine intolerance of her nonsense.

How is it that I know so much—the very details of their looks and words? In after days—when Adeline and Murphy were dead—Pray used to talk of her by the hour, and bore me to death.

He looked down at her. His first painful impression was that she had grown very thin; he had not noticed it before. However, this impression passed, and he watched her with the ardent eye of an artist. Her gray eyes stared out troublously, vaguely, from the shelter of the great elm, at the heavy rain falling in the open. He loved her intensely. I expect he loved her more, in his steady, level-headed way, than she loved him. He never talked about it; these women with so many words of love are very often only words.

She must have been very tiresome, judging from what he told me. She was always fondling him; a

man gets sick of that. He said that she seemed to have a sort of agonized remorse in her tenderness. I could have explained.

Suddenly the rain stopped, and a bar of yellow broke the slaty sky.

"Come on," he said; "never mind the rushes."

"But I do mind." She picked up the bundle, with its wide, delicate flowers and sword-like leaves, and carried it against her breast, making the front of her bodice dark with moisture.

As they went along in the watery sun she shivered.

"You've caught cold. I——"

"Told me so. I haven't caught cold. But I have saved from utter ruin the gown which took you some pains to design."

Then she added, catching his loose hand in hers:

"I only *say* stupid things. I get a little tired of being different, that is all; no doubt other people get just as tired of being the same."

They were in sight of their cottage gate. Three-year-old Betty, their only child, was hanging over

it, hauling a kitten round the middle. Adeline pulled up in the shadow of the irregular hazel hedge.

"You promise?"

Her eyes were half mirthful, half tragic.

"Promise what?"

"How men forget! To—put it in the paper."

He turned on her angrily.

"This is unlike you—even you. This is too ridiculously, wickedly morbid."

"Isn't it? But—but you promise just the same."

"Yes, anything—if you'll go up at once and change your shoes," he returned a little moodily, and kissing her with habitual carelessness on the hot lips she held up.

She ran through the gate. He heard her humming lightly as she went upstairs. He picked up baby Betty with a sigh, and swung her on his back, feeling grateful that she at least had no complex emotions. A sugar-stick would bare her little simple soul.

. . . . .

A week later Adeline died. The cold she caught under the elms developed into pneumonia. She was

a creature all nerves and no muscle. *I* know that her conscience killed her. She was dead. Dead in the June days, which had suddenly turned hot and yellow. Dead! lying rigid under the brooding thatch eaves where the birds built. Lying cold and unresponsive to birds, flowers, sun, love—all the things which had moved her to hot, mournful passion. Almost her last words were, "Life has been lovely, lovely." Then with a little haunting flicker of anxiety, memory, and fear on that face which already seemed to belong to some other world, she added faintly, "You'll put it in the paper?"

James Pray, broken-hearted, sent off the notice. It had been only a freak, of course; one of the whimsical, morbid ideas which she had in such plenty. But it was sacred. It was such a hideously little while since the afternoon under the elms. She had looked so haggardly beautiful. He remembered everything—down to a green caterpillar which crawled on her hair.

Next day he walked into the village and bought a copy of the newspaper, and brought it home and spread it out on the oak table in front of him.

"I wonder why?" he said, in a voice choked by tenderness, and then he went up to her.

Their bedroom, like the rest of the cottage, spoke of the persistent struggle for individuality. The bed was a tent, with curtains and canopy of brown and white; old chintz the color of coffee which is three parts milk. There was a patchwork quilt. She had made it from sentiment, not industry. There was the shine of oak and the twinkle of metal about the furniture. The chairs had rush seats, and had been collected, one by one, from other cottages.

He sat down and looked at the figure which was stretched so quietly under the canopy of sad brown. I try to picture him as he sat in that room with his unconventional clothes—you know the sort of thing, velvet coat, baggy knickerbockers, and streaming ends of a vivid necktie—and rugged, simple face; he might have been a man of a hundred years back. He could have had no place in this whirling, struggling nineteenth century, this common age.

The cuckoo was calling, with a voice much the worse for wear, "Cuckoo. Cuckoo. Cuck-cuck-cuckoo, cuckoo, Cuck. Cuck. He groaned, remem-

bering that she would never hear a word against the cuckoo—that genus of birds who scorned dull routine and domesticity. She used to add a bit mournfully, with one of those fierce sudden kisses which had bothered him so at the time, and which he would have given all his art for now, that a cuckoo sort of woman would have suited him. She filled the world—this dead, perplexing Adeline of his. Would he ever be able to touch or hear, or speak, or see without that tender, pensive ghost at his side!

He looked about him as the cuckoo called. The room was dear, so dear, from the days when Betty, a funny, bald baby, had kicked and gurgled in that queer oak cradle beside the bed. They had made the child participate in their eccentricities from the very start. She never had a perambulator, her dolly was a grotesque, home-made one, her clothes were made from mediæval designs.

Dear! with so many common, precious details. How many mornings had *she* sat before that shield-shaped glass, and wound the silk of her long, pale hair about her head! That little drawer on the left

was sacred to her ribbons—an end of rose was hanging out.

And then he looked at her, going close to the bed and stooping as if to caress her. But the dead face tantalized him. The eternal, remorseful tenderness was strong on her lips of steel. There had always been a sprig of rue in her love. Why? that maddening why—never to be answered. There had been a locked chamber in her heart.

He turned away, not even kissing her brow. This still, white woman on the bed was not his. He and this soulless face were strangers. He felt her more in the never-ceasing call of the bird, in tall heads of lilies in the garden, and ephemeral patches of Shirley poppies which she had sown in March, in Betty's ringing shout as she darted like a humming-bird across the grass.

The room became suddenly hateful; every corner, every picture on the wall was a pang. Her gown—the delicate gown she had given her life for—hung fresh on the nail. It seemed mutely to hold her shape: in the sleeves, the folds across the bosom, the short, round waist.

The sight of it was more than he could bear. She had been so clever, so daring, so different. Clever, not in a positive, productive way,—stupid women could produce,—but she had thrown her capacity about with royal lavishness; putting it into everything she did, if it were only a pudding, or a new border in the garden.

He had sweepingly deemed nearly every other woman a fool. Yet she had simply died for her finery. You couldn't have a meaner, a more frivolous end. She was only Eve, like all the rest, treasuring her apron of fig leaves. He blamed the inanimate thing of lace and soft wool for everything. He dragged it off the nail and trampled on it.

He went into the garden, at the piteous request of Betty, and played ball. She had on a pink frock, the color of the ragged robins that bloomed in the wood. He would on no account tolerate mourning, but the pitying country woman who was their servant had tied a black ribbon on the child's flaxen head.

Adeline had made that frock. Adeline had fer-

reted out the stuff at the village shop and carried it home in triumph, knowing he would be pleased. 'Adeline! Adeline! He seemed to see her fleet white fingers moving along the seams.

They played ball until bedtime. He sat beside the cot in the dusk, a lonely, bereft man, until the little one, who was mystified and tearful, fell asleep. When he went downstairs the paper was still spread out stiffly on the oak table. He picked it up and read again—the one paragraph on the whole sheet.

"Adeline, wife of James Pray."

. . . . .

That very night Murphy and I and Carrie Dark were dining in his rooms—that set which had known Adeline, which later on was to know James Pray.

Carrie was sixteen, a little girl in a sweet shop—one of those shops where they put nothing but billows of silk and fondants in the window.

Murphy was middle-aged—with a wide margin. I should have said fifty-five, but he only owned up to forty. That was one of his contemptible tricks;

he was just like a woman. The things we love and look for in a woman are contemptible in a man. He was what I should call a pretty chap—all regular features, pink cheeks, and pouting lip. Men disliked him, but he was a tremendous favorite with women. His influence over them was quite uncanny.

Carrie was nervous; she had never been in an Inn before. She evidently considered Murphy, with his stale stories of the aristocracy and his brag about his elder brother's place in Kerry, very magnificent. She wasn't a country girl, you see, and consequently lacked the rustic stolidity which sometimes passes for dignity. She caught up the newspaper while she waited for her fish, and when she saw the notice of Adeline's death she gave a youthful giggle.

"I shouldn't like to go through life with a name like that," she said derisively, with a not over-clean forefinger on that short word PRAY.

Murphy was pouring sherry into her glass. The waiter—we had ordered the dinner from across the way—came in.

"Like what?" asked Murphy, smiling at her paternally.

"Pray!" She tossed her head and giggled again, and then she read the notice aloud.

You should have seen Murphy's face! A strange silence like a pall settled over the table; to me the news seemed to creep round those silent walls which had reflected Adeline's shadow so often. It was the effect of Murphy's frozen expression.

But a man cannot live with a dead woman, especially when she belonged to someone else. I touched Carrie's foot under the table. She was too young and pretty for a fossil like Murphy. He had snatched the paper from her and was reading the notice for himself.

"Who was she?" demanded the girl, with the freedom of her class toward a chance admirer.

"A lady I knew," Murphy told her curtly.

Carrie flushed. She resented the word—in these days of universal ladyhood. She was affronted. She was wishing that she had gone straight home from the shop to Battersea as usual, instead of being taken in Murphy's toils at the corner of the Circus.

Her round, childish face grew sulky. The evening was quite spoiled by this stupid dead woman.

Murphy began to eat savagely, talking to me in a jerky way as he did so.

"Dead!" he said in a dazed way, with his jaws working nervously as he swallowed some bread. "Why, she was quite a young woman; she couldn't have been thirty——"

"Thirty!" echoed Carrie, in a scornful undertone.

"We dined here, five years ago—you were of the party. We cooked the dinner ourselves; she thought it such fun. The soup was salt—you must remember."

His voice was so anxious that I said soothingly, "Of course I do."

"What a handsome girl she was!" he continued with sad enthusiasm. "It was the night of the Duke of York's wedding."

"The Duke of York's wedding?" cried irrepressible Carrie. "That is ever so long ago. We had a holiday from school. My mother went to see the illuminations and got her pocket picked."

She looked at Murphy with a new expression. He had been doing exactly the same thing five years before—only the girl was different. He must be quite old. She had not thought of that before. She had only considered that he was a gentleman. She felt depressed by the antique flavor of her company. I could see that she was thinking fervently that in future she would go straight back to Battersea.

"We were a jolly party," Murphy went on. "What a row Elizabeth made next day!"

"Elizabeth?"

"Married sister. Lived in Colville Gardens. Husband a parson—but a decent fellow. I used to visit them—of course they did not suspect—Adeline was clever, but she got found out like all the clever ones. There was a deuce of a row. Soon after she married Pray. Neither of them had a penny. Went and starved in the country. I could not have married her. It was out of the question altogether. She did not expect it. How fond she was of me!" He smiled, more with vanity than regret.

"You couldn't marry her, of course," I echoed,

just for the sake of saying something. "She wouldn't expect it."

"She said that when she died she'd let me know," Murphy went on, looking a little scared. He was superstitious, like all Irishmen. "It was in Colville Square, the night before her wedding. She crept out after dinner. I can see her now in her light gown with her big arms bare to the elbow and a thin chain round her neck. I remember that we stayed out a long time, walking round and round the railings. It was so late that I couldn't get a cab back to the Inn and had to walk all the way. She looked so queer. She said she'd——"

"Haunt you," I finished, sick of his maunderings. "Well, she made sure of poor Pray. I'm sorry for that fellow. He put in the notice, of course—for you to see. She did the most that was possible in these practical days."

He did not seem to hear me.

"Dead!" he went on, in a monologue sort of way, while Carrie, her fork halfway to her mouth and her elbows on the table, stared at him scornfully. "Her eyes! Gray, Irish eyes. She was

an Irish girl—the Mahoneys of Roscommon. You remember the dinner? She sat where you are now —facing the cupboard."

A long, clear note came from the set over the way, with the gay rattle of piano keys beneath quick fingers.

"How well that girl of Martin's sings!" I said irrelevantly.

"I saw her once afterward. She was with her husband; it *must* have been Pray, a long-faced, badly dressed chap. I was with Bob Piety, at the Aquarium. I suppose they had come up from the country, determined on amusement; married people have their moments of *ennui*. They looked out of place. Adeline was so changed that I was not sure of her. Her good looks were gone and her mouth was harsh. She looked at me; I looked at her. I turned to Bob and said in a loud voice:

"'Auntie!'

"That used to be my pet name for her. She turned to her husband and returned very clearly:

"'Yes.'

"That was all. We both made our explanations

—I to Bob, she to her husband. I didn't see her again that evening; I've never seen her since. Dead!"

He got up hurriedly and looked round for his hat.

"See after her," he said huskily, jerking his head toward pretty Carrie, "I can't—to-night. Take her to a music hall—anything."

He went away abruptly, leaving me a fair field. He was bent as he walked. He looked too old for the Inn; we don't want graybeards.

"What's up with him?" demanded Carrie.

"Liver. Have some more champagne?"

I caught up the bottle.

"No, thanks." She snatched her glass away and the wine slobbered out on the cloth.

"Who was she?" she persisted. "I don't care a brass farthing. She'd be as old as the hills, if she was alive. But—who was she?"

"A lady that he knew years ago."

"Lady!" sneered Carrie, spitefully, with a nasty, upward curl of her ripe lip. "Why, she was the same as me—he said so."

"She was a woman, my dear; that's all. Have

you really finished? Then where shall we go?"

She put on her hat in a hurry and cast decisively for a popular contortionist at one of the halls—I think it was the Royal.

"They say he twists himself about something awful," she added, with a little grimace and a gleeful shudder.

We clattered down the stairs. The oak thudded heavily behind our quick feet, as if it had regrets for Adeline.

JIMMY.

His full name was James Adolphus Carol, but everyone called him just Jimmy. He was Jimmy to all of us in the Inn; Jimmy to the music-hall managers and music-hall artistes.

He was a little spindle-shanked fellow, like a jockey, but a bit too gentlemanly. He had bulging, gray-blue eyes and a sunken, heavily freckled face. His top hat was always very sleek and a little on one side, but the rest of his dress fell short of perfect finish. I've seen him with his shoe tied up with string and his collar pinned together in front because he'd lost his last stud.

He was dreadfully hard up, but that is nothing. We resent a prosperous fellow. I don't fancy he ever had any regular meals. Men stood him drinks, and he had a trick of turning up at your rooms about midnight, talking brilliantly and wildly for about half an hour, and then saying carelessly, " Have you got any bread and butter knocking about, old

man?" Fellows who didn't know him very well would suggest a square meal—a chop, or a sausage and mashed at Mimm's, just outside the gates—then Jimmy would be affronted.

He was always being dunned and pretended that he liked it. Perhaps he really did. He was full of schemes for evading duns. He was an authority on judgment-summonses, pawnshops, shooting the moon, and obtaining credit. He would hold forth eloquently on the delights of being dunned. I forget the particular points he made, but they were very forcible—coming from him.

He used to borrow unblushingly, but his gift in that way was restricted—very few of us had any money to lend.

He had the finest private collection of pawn-tickets that I ever saw. His pockets were full of them. I remembered that he once went to a swell party—some musical affair. He was very polite, very strict on questions of etiquette. The day after the party he made the usual formal call at the house—it was some big place near Sloane Street. His hat was very sleek, he had a frock coat, a flower in

his button-hole—everything complete. He handed his card to the footman, and as he did so a couple of pawn-tickets fluttered gently to the door-mat. The flunkey stooped, picked them up, and handed them gracefully back to Jimmy—who took them with equal grace. He told me the whole performance was superb—in perfect style. It was done without a word, without a smile. They did not dare look at each other.

Jimmy's rooms were untidy and his style of housekeeping not to be commended. He never kept a laundress for very long—because he never paid her. Yet the women loved him and worked for nothing so long as they could. He used to chaff them lightly, explain the state of his exchequer. He took a personal interest in their family life. They told him their troubles; drunken husbands, big families, pugnacious lodgers on the next landing, the hard heart of the landlords when they came upstairs with their black books for the weekly rent.

When Mrs. Morey was ill Jimmy went down Green Street to see her, with a couple of French novels—translations—under his arm. She had

a gathering on her ankle which she showed him with pride, in spite of his courteous protest, but she declined the offer of the novels.

"You're very kind, sir," she said. "But I don't suppose as your books 'ud suit me. I was brought up very particular. I like something good—the Bible or the Common Prayer or the Sunday newspaper. I makes my 'usband read 'When the wicked man turneth,' in the 'opes it 'll be a lesson to 'im. No, there's nothin' as the doctor's ordered, thank you, sir—except to keep my strength up."

She took Jimmy's last sixpence gratefully, and asked him to stop and share the half-quartern of gin which her youngest little girl but three ran to the public house to fetch. Very likely he stayed; it would have been just like him. He was a crank. Fancy a man offering Paul de Kock and Flaubert to an Inn of Court laundress! He paid for the gin, but he lightly ignored the two months' money he owed her, and she never reminded him.

His sitting room was full of books, on open shelves and thick with dust. They were the admiration of Mrs. Morey.

"I thought Mr. Slobkins 'ad a lot," she said, "'im as I worked for in Furnival's. 'E's a magistrate or a clerk or somethin' o' that sort, yer see. But, lor, this lot bangs 'is."

Stanch Mrs. Morey! She was a little roly-poly kind of woman, with eyes like ripe sloes, and she worked for Jimmy for six months without ever receiving a penny.

"My 'usband 'ud kill me if 'e knowed," she said, smiling plaintively as she scrubbed the boards. "'E's bin out o' work for nearly a year. It's hard work for me to fill the kids' mouths and keep 'im in grub and pocket money. But 'e's a good 'usband when 'e aint drunk. I wish 'e 'ad more luck, that's all."

"What is his trade?" asked Jimmy languidly—he was always languid until the gas lamps were lighted.

The little woman tossed her head.

"My 'usband aint *that* sort, jest able to do one kind o' work. 'E can turn 'is 'and to anythin'. But I wish 'e wasn't quite so partikler."

She came to me privately when Jimmy's health

began to break. She said that he didn't eat enough to keep a sparrow alive, that it worried her awful, that she feared he was going off in a galloping decline.

"It's jest the way my niece's 'usband was took," she concluded. "'E used to drive a vegetable cart, and 'e's layin' in the Brompton Simmetery. As nice a young man as ever you see, and played the flute bootiful. 'E was took bad in May and dead in December. He was indeed, and 'er with six little children—all babies, as you might say, and another on the road—if you'll excuse my free way of speakin'. My niece she's got the flute under a glass case in the parlor window, for the mountings is silver."

But Jimmy was too far gone for my care, or anyone else's. No doubt he had been consumptive for years, and a constitution kept up principally on "nipping" never thrives. There was a doctor living in the Inn at the time—a very good fellow. He visited him and gave him medicine—don't believe Jimmy ever took it. His cough got gradually worse and his face fell in more than ever. But he

was always full of jokes, rather grim jokes sometimes. I've seen girls shiver and scream with laughter at the same time. He went to a music hall every night, spending most of his time at the bar. He called the artistes by their Christian names—Queenie this, or Dan the other. The Queenies gave him their full confidence. Big, flashy girls, these music-hall girls, with free, not over-clean tongues and very good hearts. They would frighten you, but they don't mean any harm. Jimmy used to write songs for them—which they very seldom bought. He did both words and music. His airs were most melodious and "catchy," but his words were never quite vulgar enough. None of his songs "caught on."

I never knew a man with such a marvelous ear. If he went to a comic opera he would come straight home and play all the lyrics without a false note. He played Chopin by ear; he used to sit for hours extemporizing the most weird, fascinating, tantalizing music. He ought to have made his fortune. Instead of that, he went into consumption and died —for want of proper food.

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Now and again someone sent him a postal order. He never said who. He was a bit of a mystery. They were only small orders—under a pound, as if they had been scraped by some woman out of the housekeeping money, or her dress allowance. But I never knew. The last one he had was for fifteen shillings. He was on his last legs. The steward of the Inn, who was most forbearing—because it was Jimmy—had sent a deprecating note in to say that he must distrain if something, ever so little, was not paid on account of the year's rent. Mrs. Morey had left him at last. Even his top hat was rough. Yet what do you think he did? Went out and bought a bath sponge for fifteen and six, promising to leave the sixpence next time he was passing.

I met him on the stairs and he displayed the sponge proudly.

"Only fifteen and six! Dirt cheap, isn't it? It would be unpardonable extravagance to let a chance like that slip, wouldn't it? And I wanted a bath sponge; the one I've got isn't nearly big enough. Come up to my place. We'll put it in water. Just you watch how it swells!"

You may say bluntly that he was a fool. Of course he was. But it is the fools and the failures who win our hearts.

We went up to his rooms. He put the sponge to swell and sat down to the piano and forgot all about it. I should like to hear Jimmy play music-hall songs again; nothing was ever so charming. He knew them all. He used to sing the refrains in a thin, shrill voice, accompanying in his own wonderful way. Everything he touched became classic.

A week after he bought the sponge Harrowsmith —he was the young doctor—ordered him out of London. Fortunately I made a haul about that time, so we went together to Farthings Farm, as I'll tell you later on.

Farthings Farm was the last nail in Jimmy's coffin. He never spent a more miserable month. He would be morose, half asleep all day. But at dusk, just when the theaters would be opening and the racket in the Strand at its flow, he'd be restless. All the sweet smells and sounds of the farm were a poor enough substitute. The country finished him. He was a pure Cockney. There is no half way with

the Cockney; either he loves the country passionately, or he hates it and chafes at it until it kills him. Saints and criminals are made by the country; it depends on how you take it. We hadn't been back ten days before he broke a blood vessel and kept his bed. What was to be done with him? *He* never bothered. He believed in taking things easy. He had a favorite axiom about never putting up your umbrella until it rained—and ended by not having an umbrella at all! He just drifted. He was dying. He hadn't a penny in the world; he was up to his eyes in small debts.

"Pack him off to the hospital," advised Arnold rather brutally. "Poor devil! A fellow who earns a fiver and lives on it until it's gone. I've no sympathy with that sort of thing. The hospital's the place for him. I'll pay the cab fare."

However, the rest of us decided to club together and keep him going, first telling Arnold that he did the invalid an injustice; Jimmy had never earned a five-pound note, in a lump sum, in his life. Harrowsmith had told us privately that his case was quite hopeless. We could pull along somehow.

Nutting, the steward, would wait a little longer for his rent; when Jimmy was gone the piano alone would pay that. One or other of us could look in; Mrs. Morey must be got back. The only difficulty was with Jimmy himself—he was so deuced proud.

A woman came to the rescue. Queenie La Belle was a regular brick. She bought up all his songs. Who but a woman would have thought of that? She'd come in, all sham diamonds and jolly voice, and sit down by his bed and tell him how well his songs were going at the halls. She said she was singing them at three nightly. She assured him that she was always encored. She begged him to take an extra ten pounds—the original price had been in shillings.

"You see, I've made that girl," Jimmy would say when she had gone. "I knew those songs would just fit her. She wants more. Give me a bit of paper and pencil, old chap. I'll dot down another. Why does Harrowsmith keep me tied by the leg like this? I mean to get up next week and toddle down to the halls and hear my songs encored. They give Queenie a middle turn now. They used

to put her on at the end, to sing the audience out. I'm a made man. It's just as well, with all the expenses of this illness. Are you going up Tottenham Court Road to-day? If so, look in and pay the fellow that sixpence owing on the sponge. I've never used it. Harrowsmith knocked me off my cold tub. You can't mistake the shop. It's nearly opposite Maple's. I forget the name."

He put on tremendous airs. He was, as he proudly said, a made man. When he got better he was going to write songs at fabulous prices for all the leading music-hall singers. But Queenie La Belle should have them at a reasonable figure. She wasn't a bad sort. She ought to be grateful to him. He had made her. He kept his money under his pillow with his tobacco pouch and cigarette papers. He said seriously to me:

"If you're a little short, old chap, there's plenty of money in the bag. I've gone through the mill myself. I know what it is to come down to my last half-crown."

He might truthfully have said his last copper. To please him I took five shillings.

Queenie came to see him regularly. He put the poor girl through a rigid cross-examination. Did the audience take up her two last lines, as he had intended? Were his songs on the barrel organs? The great ambition of his life had been to hear his songs on the barrel organs. But it was early days. It was just as well that they were not on yet. He wanted to hear them. Wanted to tip every grinder a bob. Queenie had to sing the songs to him; had to do the little kick at the end of each verse, pretend to throw the rose into the auditorium—that was Jimmy's original trick.

"I'd like to come down and hear you to-night at the Royal," he sighed—and Queenie looked horribly frightened, until I reassured her by a dismal shake of the head. "But Harrowsmith is so particular. He keeps me in bed. Of course that makes a man weak. There's nothing in the world the matter with me but weakness, through want of exercise."

Queenie put on her tremendous hat, all flyaway lace and wings. She stooped down and kissed him solemnly on his clammy forehead. I thought the

big, jolly girl, with her coarse voice and frank tongue, an angel at that moment. Jimmy looked scared and annoyed—suspicious of this unusual gentleness.

She blubbered outside the bedroom door, growing purple in her efforts to choke her sobs lest he should hear.

"It's all a lie," she said passionately. "I'm only on at one hall—last turn on the programme. His song don't fetch even a grin. I'm expecting the manager to bully me on pay day. People don't understand 'em—I don't myself. It's a lie. I was hissed—hissed! And there's him, poor dear, talking of writing for Guy Blockley and Ada Fitz Clare. Oh! it's all right about the ten pounds, I can run to that. Don't you fret."

She colored, through her make-up—her daylight make-up, all careless smears of blue-white powder and burning smudges of red.

Nearly every night, after the halls and the public houses were shut, one or two fellows would drop into Jimmy's room and give him the evening's news. They sang snatches of new songs to him, mimicked

bits of "business." They retailed the popular comedian's latest gag, the story that was going the round of the clubs, the smart conundrum on public affairs or people.

Jimmy used to join in weakly, drumming his claw-like fingers on the quilt. He talked of music-hall people of to-day; of five years ago; of men who had been lions and were content to take obscure turns in the provinces now, or who had gone in for the dramatic-agent business.

They all ran off his glib tongue; the Sisters That, the Brothers So and So, the Something Troupe. He laughed at old wheezes, which had never lost their flavor for him. He spoke of this man's pet mannerisms and that girl's particular smile.

He used to say:

"Do you remember Joe Slashby's trick with the pair of spectacles? That was killing," or, "What's become of the Manasteriotti girl? Never saw a woman juggle so well."

And he always condemned everyone else's songs. He said it pained him to see the rot, the arrant, foolish drivel that went down with a music-hall au-

dience. But he was going to alter all that. The public only wanted educating. The public knew a good thing when it heard it. That was proved by the success of his songs. How had his songs gone this evening? Queenie was a good sort, but he was a little nervous of her, afraid she didn't quite do him justice. He added that she had treated him rather meanly; ten pounds was a poor price with which to buy success. She must be getting twenty pounds a week at the lowest. Three halls at twenty each. That would be sixty. He must speak to her.

Success had not improved Jimmy. He was going the way of all successes. He actually spoke of starting a banking account when he got better, of giving a big order to his tailor. He probably would have decided on a house at Brixton and a brougham, if he had lived long enough. But—before he had time to tax Queenie over money matters—the end came.

It was Saturday. Harrowsmith looked in about noon. He told me that Jimmy wouldn't last another twenty-four hours. I went back to the bed-

room and broke it. He was lying on his side, turning off another song. He took it very calmly, only hoping that he'd be able to get that third line in the second verse right before he went. It was very weak.

Schultz, the great German composer, died the day before; it had been in the morning papers. Jimmy said composedly, when I mentioned it:

"There's another of us gone. Lucky devil!"

He added a little rebelliously:

"It's rather rough to have to hand in your checks just when you've 'arrived.' I hope I shan't be so long about it as the woman at Farthings Farm was. Queer old girl! You'll make Harrowsmith send in his bill and pay up any little thing I owe. Get the money out of Queenie. That girl's been a bit shabby. And just roll me a cigarette—there's enough baccy in the pouch—and leave me alone to worry out this third line."

He was lying at the back; Orion, if you remember, had his bedroom in the front, but Jimmy had turned that into a bathroom.

All the Saturday night bubble of the streets came

up into the little paneled room where he was dying. He liked it; asked me to open the window, so that he could hear the hoarse voices of the costers and the banter of the women. He liked the rattle of 'buses, the cries, the calls—all the feverish, struggling life.

One by one the fellows dropped in as usual. He begged them not to put on such deathbed faces. How had his songs gone? He was afraid that he wouldn't see Queenie any more. The fellows stayed; he begged them to. I'd asked him if he had any friends that he would like me to send for, and he returned airly that he hadn't a relative in the world. His face never flinched when he said it.

The night went on, and the room, although the month was August, got chilly. The sounds of the market died down, the omnibuses left off running, so did the trams; there was only a dying trundle of hansoms over the stones. Then all at once came a ringing howl from some slum at the back. They have pulled them nearly all down now. All the narrow courts I used to know, the tiny general shops, the row of almshouses, the big boiled-beef

shop at the corner—gone. Residential flats are in their place and big shops with sky signs.

It was some Saturday-night row. It came in plainly through the open window. Jimmy opened his eyes and listened with zest.

You won't understand the grim sentiment of those slum rows. They are simply part of the Saturday night's programme—when the man gets his week's money and the woman goes out shopping and they both are blind drunk by midnight. Simply part of Saturday night—that is all. It does not affect their relations for the rest of the week. The language they use to each other is awful—but what are words? We place too great a stress on mere words.

Jimmy roused up a little, and grinned feebly.

"Shouldn't wonder if it's Mrs. Morey," he said.

We sat and listened to the woman's shrill, passionate invective—to adjectives which were foreign even to us. We heard the husband's low, deprecating growl, and, after a little, the protesting bass of the policeman. The woman was infuriated at the interruption.

"Has anybody complained?" she yelled, going

up half an octave at each word. "Well! Well! Everybody 'as their rows, don't they? Move on yourself. Oh! you *brute!*"

Then we heard a scuffle, more words, a torrent of tears and abuse.

But it was all quiet at last; the short spell of silence between the last cab and the venders of Sunday papers.

"Referee!" "Lloyd's!" "Weekly Dispatch!"

The men went bawling along the pavements beneath. Jimmy, who had collapsed after the row, opened his eyes again.

"Give me a whisky," he said. "Fill up. I'll say when."

As I was pouring the water, and waiting for him to stop me, he murmured enthusiastically:

"How good Dot and Lottie Mack were in that laughing duet. Lottie married an earl. I wonder what became of Dot."

When I took the tumbler and whisky and water to the side of the bed, he was dead.

We fetched Mrs. Morey to lay him out. She was ghoulishly curious about the funeral, and kept

me half an hour while she told me about her father's.

"'E belonged to a club, don't yer see, and when 'e died there was twenty pound. My Bill wanted to blow it. But I ses no. It was 'is and 'e should 'av it. We 'ad mourning coaches to fetch all the people from their own doors. There was mutes—yer don't often see them now—and weepers, and feathers in the 'orses' 'eads. An' yer should 'a' seen the tea we set down to when we come 'ome from the funeral! We 'ad thin bread and butter, and winkles and three sorts of cake. I felt so mad with Bill. 'E goes and clouts my little Jim's 'ead, jest because the innercent child said as 'e wished grandfathers 'ud die every day, so as we might 'ave sich a bustin' tea. It was only natural in the child. Rose Adkins —she's my brother's wife—took Bill's part. I didn't forgit it neither. A nice one to talk, *she* wur! We was 'avin' a few words, months after, and I ses to 'er:

"'"You 'ussy! 'Ow dare you talk to me?' I ses. '"Ow many slices of thin bread and butter did you eat at my poor father's funeral tea? I saw yo

take ten with my own eyes.' *That* fetched 'er. 'Be off,' I ses, 'and don't ever show yer brazen face in my door agen.'"

. . . . .

Well, we buried Jimmy. I rode with him, in a dreadful conveyance they call a Shillibeer, to Finchley. When I went back to the Inn and began to square up his affairs, the water bed was missing. We had clubbed together and hired that water bed for him before Queenie's deception. I heard long afterward that Mrs. Morey had pawned it at the pawnbroker's at the corner of Green Street. No doubt Bill, for once, was too strong for her.

About two months afterward there was a faint tap at my door one night. When I opened it I saw a woman standing outside. How shall I describe her?

She wasn't young—your age, if you'll forgive me, thirty or so—but there was a youthfulness and freshness about her which you seldom see in a girl out of her teens. She wasn't pretty, not a bit. She didn't even look clever. Yet I've never seen a more fascinating, a more delightful woman. She was a

little like Adeline, only not half so handsome, and there was not the mark of knowledge on her face. She said firmly, "Does Mr. James Carol live here?"

Her voice was calm, but it was only the calmness of perfect breeding. There was none of a sister's cold, lily-like air about her—no tepid, anxious touch of family concern. Jimmy had been her world.

She was a lady, using the word in its old dignified, graceful sense, without modern abuse, without that vulgar, exasperating "i" which degrades it into "laidy."

"I'm sorry to say that Jimmy—Mr. Carol—is dead."

She didn't wait for me to say any more. She dropped at my feet on the dirty boards of the landing; dropped without a cry, without a contortion of her charming, pure face.

I got her round as well as I could. While I was fanning her with a doubled-up newspaper and trying to force brandy down her throat, I noticed the subtle refinements of her dress. And there was a haunting memory in that face. I thought that I must have seen it before, until I remembered Farthings

Farm and the old woman who tended Mrs. Covey. I remembered, too, Jimmy's flicker of animation when he had seen that woman—and I understood. There was the same peculiar, fascinating sweetness of expression; an expression which would lure you to any madness at the start and cloy you to death long before the finish.

I got her round. She went away, with beautifully expressed thanks—and not a flutter of her eyelids.

That is all. The key to Jimmy's love affair—if he had one—lies with him at Finchley.

GAME FEATHERS.

JIMMY and I once spent a month in the country together. The doctor had ordered him fresh air and good diet. We went to Farthings Farm in Sussex and boarded with old Mrs. Covey. She was an extraordinary character—narrowly religious, as these half-educated rustics so often are. You could see hell fire in the hard lines of her mouth and the cunning screw of her little gray eyes. Yet she wasn't a bad sort. Her pious cant was amusing and quite harmless. She talked seriously to Jimmy, knowing, as she must have done, that he had not long to live. She used to say, with a half-groaning, half-chuckling sort of breath:

"Ah! sir, I believe in the sacrifice in *this* world."

Jimmy returned, very politely—he was always polite:

"I'm afraid I don't quite gather your meaning."

Mrs. Covey would look at him despairingly, raise her eyes to the ceiling, shake her head, and ejaculate

a long, solemn "Ah—ah!" which was very convincing.

She was up at daybreak every morning; we used to hear her scolding and swilling or throwing a pet word to her cats—she had five. But on Sundays she used to lie very late—until half-past seven. She took a bath—as a pious duty. When breakfast was over, she sat in the living room, with the big Bible in front of her and her spectacles on the open page, until it was time to go to chapel. She drove there regularly every Sunday. It was a rich sight to see her with her two sons, in the shabby wagonette, sitting bolt upright in widow's weeds, with black kid gloves, purple in the palms and much too long in the fingers. Sunday was a day of days. We fed on cold meat and salad; it was the one day on which she refused to sell milk or to spud about in her garden. In the afternoon she would walk solemnly through her meadows, never speculating on the crops or allowing her sons to do so, but holding up her black silk skirt carefully, and drawing her sour Sabbath lip.

She was very kind to Jimmy—taking good care

of his body, although she despaired of his soul. In her young days she had been a cook, and she tempted his flagging appetite with many dainties. There was one particular dish of candied red currants.

If anyone called on her—say, between three and half-past—for milk, for advice about a sick baby, for herbal treatment of a wound, or for the simple loan of a black crock, Jib or Zak would be lurching at the house door. They were grotesquely alike, those sons of hers, with the Biblical names of Jabez and Zachary. She always called them Jib and Zak on week days; Jabez and Zachary on Sundays. They had an odd way of greeting you. They gave a nod—half sheepish, half jovial—or they raised a broad, dingy thumb to a sun-baked straw hat, according to their mood or the social status of the visitor.

Their answer to all inquiries was:

"Mother 'ull be down directly. Would you care to step inside out o' the sun and set down, till you hear her draw up the clock?"

That was her rule. For forty years, except when stopped by trivialities—such as a confinement—she

had drawn up the thirty-hour clock the moment before she came down from her afternoon's cleaning.

That afternoon black dress, with jet buttons! I remember the tiny, shiny silk apron, with the bead edging and the prim pockets. She never put in her false teeth until the afternoon, nor pinned on her false hair, which was three shades too light. In the mornings she slipped about the kitchen and dairy in an old skirt, a nondescript bodice, and a shawl—thick or thin, according to the direction of the wind.

I remember the particular morning when she was taken ill. It was a tremendously hot day in June. Jimmy was sitting on the wooden bench by the garden door, with his thin hands spread out on his knees to bake in the sun. I was hanging about the garden, and longing to get back to the Inn. Mrs. Covey came out from the dairy with a dish clout in her hand. She began to vigorously "shoo" a fine cock from the strawberry bed. I can see her now, with her bent back in the brownish bodice and triangular-folded scarlet shawl. She went back to the house between rows of podded broad beans.

When she cried out to the cock—who was a gay fellow, all brown and burnish—it was a queer, unwomanly cry. No doubt she knew the note with which to scare him. He went racing back to the yard, all tail feathers, swinging comb, and indignant cackle.

An hour afterward she fell on the flagstones by the back door. She had been very busy making jelly of windfall apples. Apoplexy gripped her, and she fell, a droll-looking, lop-sided heap, on the stones.

That was a long, hot, empty day. Jimmy was fretful and selfish, after the manner of chronic invalids. He missed his egg and milk, his jelly, the dozen little dainties that she prepared for him. And I think he was a trifle scared, poor chap, by the very mention of Death—Death, that unpleasant personage, with whom he already had a bowing acquaintance.

The doctor came—a hearty country man, in a high, rakish-looking trap. He said there was no hope for her. A woman came in and got her to bed. Her world waited breathlessly, soberly for her

to go. Her world—of forty acres or so—was waiting stolidly. Birds in the wood—metallic finches, throaty wood pigeons, the persistent cuckoo, called across the branches and the long, rank grass of her. She had known so many generations of birds.

Out by the back door everything was eloquent of her: pans of unskimmed milk in the dairy, the preserving pan, with a wooden skimmer set in syrup.

Jimmy crawled up the white road in the sun to the public house. But I stayed behind. I was fond of the queer old woman, and I thought that perhaps I might come in useful. Zak said moodily that it was an awkward time of the year for illness. He didn't put it in words, but I knew his thought—that it was inconsiderate of her to take to dying in the middle of haymaking. In the orchard was the awning which she had roughly rigged up for the haymakers—but who was to get the men's tea? The grass in the eight-acre meadow had been left until the last. There was a merry jingle as the machine rattled and rocked along.

Jib and Zak, so much alike, with eyes and mouths twisted in consequence of life-long opposition to the

glare of the sun, came into the parlor where I sat reading the local paper. They had been clumping hopelessly about in the garden. I had watched them, finding them more interesting than the price of store pigs and the sale of underwood. They had looked out wistfully at the eight-acre field, half lush, half shorn. They had looked up at Mrs. Covey's window—a tiny window, set high in the brown thatch roof; a window with dim, greenish panes and the spectral suggestion of a limp calico curtain.

We heard the slipping, soft sound of feet. The stairs opened out from the sitting room. A beautiful old woman of forty-five or less—work in the fields and so many children make them old long before that—sidled up to the brothers, as they sat heavily in the Windsor chairs by the empty hearth. She was the village layer-out; once she had been the village coquette. Five shillings a corpse, and shillings hard to earn! Zak had run to her cottage and fetched her directly his mother fell. She was always called to deathbeds. She gave a sidelong look at me and courtesied with charming grace; some of these rustic women are queens of grace. Then she

spoke to the brothers, the greedy look of a vulture creeping into her violet eyes.

"I'm jest slipping home now to look after my lodger. There's no change in her. She won't go, bless your hearts, for pretty nigh twenty-four hour. I'll look round after tea agen; no doubt you'll make it worth my while."

For nearly a week it went on; the hot, breathless days, bees buzzing in the big lime by the gate; at dusk the ringing, rattling croak of frogs in the pond, the weird voice of the night-jar. Jimmy grew more fretful. He complained that he could not sleep for the cursed nightingale. He wanted to go home; back to the Inn, to the boys, to the halls, the bars, the evening papers. He had run out of tobacco—they only sold shag at the village shop. He took my last packet of cigarette papers. But I wanted to stay—for the end, which we all knew must come before another Sunday. That window, high in the eaves, rigorously shut and curtained, fascinated me.

On the fifth day things were just as they had been on the first, each day of that week was a replica. Jib, Zak, and I were in the parlor, the local paper

was more crumpled, the flowers on the window ledge drooped. Jimmy had crawled up in the sun and dust to the public house, where they had a crazy piano in the bar parlor. The layer-out, the Vulture, as I had grown to call her to myself, came slipping down the stairs again in easy list slippers of drab and green.

"Some dies hard," she said sententiously to the two sons, twisting the corner of her apron, shaking her wavy white head, and eying me.

"It's they game feathers she's a-layin' on," she continued. "You can't die easy on game feathers, and there's a plenty in the bed. Game feathers! They skeer off Death—but her time's come, poor love. Help lift her. Lay her on the floor; she'll go soon and easy then."

Jib and Zak looked at each other furtively, then each shook his head. They couldn't lend a hand to help her die. The Vulture knew their thought—these women are full of intuition.

"We'll call Mas'r Puttick," she said with inspiration. "And p'r'aps the gentleman would not mind lendin' a hand."

She put her own hand to her side and took a short breath, muttering something about not being strong enough to lift.

I said I'd go and fetch Puttick. He was cutting mangels in the field beyond the garden, a couple of cows following him with keen interest on the other side of the hedge. There was a wide border of white pinks to the strawberry bed; the scent was heavy. White pinks, and, on the other side of the path, broad beans in blossom.

Puttick was a very old man, older than Mrs. Covey, and his devotion to her had been the mild jest of the neighbors. He did her chivalrous service: carried down the refuse of his allotment garden for her pigs; pea haulm, cabbage stumps, turnip tops too tough for the pot, spinach that had bolted. He was always begging refuse "for t' old gell's pig." "T' old gell" he invariably called her—behind her back—with an indulgent mixture of tenderness and contempt for her as a lone widow woman, with natural, womanly ways of scraping and nagging. He left his work solemnly when I spoke to him. We went to the house. Three of the five cats were

looking askance at a saucer of sour milk set in the middle of the strawberry bed—that was "t' old gell's" way of scaring birds from her fruit. We went up the rat-eaten oak stairs, Puttick, the Vulture, and I.

There was a characteristic smell about the place: a smell of ancient garments, ropes of onions, apples on the floor of the attic, a smell garnered by closely shut casements.

She was lying gaunt and straight in the bed, with its carved posts, patchwork quilt, and dirty chintz hangings. Her face was yellow, so was her unbleached nightgown, so were her hands with their curved black nails. As we went in she looked round sharply at the door—a curious look; lurid, angry, beseeching.

Puttick muttered, with a thick throat and his old eyes dazed, "T' old gell, t' old gell." It was grim to see her lying there with an idle tongue, with idle hands. No doubt he was feeling drearily that his time must be near too. He had been a virile young man when she had been a child. The world could not go on without old Mis' Covey of Farthings

Farm. She *was* the world. No one else would keep him on with odd jobs all through the winter. She must be made to live. He said, after a long pause, during which I could see that his aged brain had been working turgidly in an agony of desire to rouse her:

"They blackbirds, dang 'em, was at the white-heart cherries as early as five this mornin'."

But she did not stir. She only stared from the wall and back again, with the odd, savage stare of entreaty, which none of us could understand.

"I've seen many go, but none so hard as her. And yet she wasn't what you'd call a worldly-minded woman. Take her under the shoulders, sir, if you kindly will, and, Mas'r Puttick, be ready to ketch her legs."

The woman put her deft hands under the bed-clothes and rolled the heavy legs in a plaid shawl. Then, between us, we lifted her from the malignant bed—full of the feathers of birds that she had plucked remorselessly and who would not let her go in peace now that her time had come. We stretched

her decently on the floor near the clock and pulled the blanket close under her peaked chin.

"We've all been young," the Vulture said confidentially to me as we jostled together down the twisting stairs. "There's something on her mind —a slip maybe. Them things comes up at the last and won't let us women go. The men are harder."

Jib and Zak were still slouching in the Windsor chairs. They were helpless without their mother, great fellows of thirty-eight and forty. But she had been the mainspring. She had kept the purse-strings, kept all control. They were mechanical figures run down without her. I sat on the couch with the blue-checked cover and speculated on her secret, on some rustic story made sweet by time, some sin—a slip, as the country woman mercifully said—something which was quivering on her tied tongue and which she couldn't give word to.

Jib and Zak went slowly back to the hayfield, Puttick to his mangels. I saw him go round the house, past the sitting-room window. He kept casting guilty glances at the window overhead with the calico blind. He had lent a hand in killing her.

But she obstinately wouldn't die. Death was expected of her. The doctor had prophesied it; the Vulture knew it would come, by many ancient, foolish signs. The impress of her long bony body dented the swollen bed of feathers, but on the sixth day she was lying alive still on the floor on a rough couch of blankets, at the foot of the clock, whose brass face seemed to leer and twinkle at her victoriously when the western sun came in.

She would not go. The patience of the layer-out was quite exhausted.

"I must bide about the place," she said plaintively. "It's money out o' pocket to me. I could be makin' a lot in the hayfields. But I dursn't leave. She'll be stiff a'most as soon as the breath is out o' her, and you can't do nothin' with a corpse then."

"Sure, sure," gurgled all the other women softly.

The room was full of women. I kept in the garden, but I could see and hear them through the open door. I could see and hear all: the sunny sitting room, with its broad window ledges, on which were pots of calceolarias, with spotted, pouch-like blos-

soms; the women, with children at their skirts or buried in their cotton bodices. All waiting and twittering in that house of death.

I knew every line of the local paper. The long clay pipe which Jib in pity had bestowed on me was cool, but it hurt my throat to draw such a long way. I smoked it from sentiment. I like those long clays, but properly speaking they should go with village politics. Jimmy was on his back in the orchard, deep in grass which had not been cut yet, rolling his last cigarette with long, transparent fingers. But he was waiting like the rest of us. He started up on his elbow when the sound came. We all heard it through the closed doors of bedroom and staircase. That sound! The wheezing creak of a chain. A minute later came the clear, deliberate chime of three. Then all the women and the two sons remembered that for six days no one had thought to draw up the clock. There was then no secret, no sin; no eating, biting prick of conscience.

. . . . .

She was dead by the open case, on her knees, with one crooked-out hand caught round the open door.

Her eyes, wide open still, were on the softly swaying pendulum, and the heavy weight was drawn high.

Jib, who had inherited his share of her practicality, and more, went up softly as soon as he was allowed to and turned the hand round to the proper place, each hour chiming in the quiet room.

Four. Five. Six. Seven.

It was evening. The haymakers had gone and a stifling mist was creeping across the cropped meadows. The promise of another blazing day.

"Ah! to think it was only *that* she wanted." The layer-out extended her hand and drew down her sweetly curved mouth. "I knew there was something on her mind; there offen is with us poor women. We've all been young——" She broke off discreetly, in the presence of the sons. "But who'd ha' thought of that plaguey clock? Why, any of us might ha' drawed it up if we'd ha' thought. I might ha' earned good money at the hayin' this week."

She went down the flagged path through the orchard to the gate. Jimmy, half buried again in

grass, long white daisies, and the delicate summer orchis, stared at her, and his face changed.

"She reminds me of someone I used to know," he said, and then stopped abruptly. It was the only peep he ever gave me into his inner life. But I remembered afterward.

We sat out until dusk, smoking—what dust of tobacco we had—and looking up trains. Jib and Zak had gone upstairs. Their voices came down to us, through the window with the greenish glass, which was now swung back. They were discussing the coming sale.

"A feather bed allus fetches money."

"There's folk—gentry—as likes this oak."

"It's a good goer, an' I've allus liked a chain better'n a cord."

"Let's take the 2.45, old man," said Jimmy. "I'd like to look in at the Royal in the evening. They've got that big girl there—Lilian—what's her name? The girl who sings Irish songs so well."

The fierce summer sun had gone to bed. All the night sounds were beginning—beetles, frogs, birds,

The nightingale that Jimmy so hated was tuning up on a hedge near.

"Shan't get a wink of sleep to-night," he said dolefully, with his hard, painful cough. "Give me the cabs for a lullaby."

Jib and Zak were coming slowly downstairs. I heard them shut her door. I could imagine her: the sheet over her hard face, the clock, to whose regularity she had given her last breath, keeping her sedate company.

AN INTERLUDE.

It was only Mrs. Conifer. Thought the woman would never go! Poor soul! What a curse a conscience is. She was a fool to come back! Said she couldn't help it! She loathes the very memory of Kinsman—she adores her husband—and yet she comes back to-night. That is so deliciously like a woman—to come back. To come creeping through the gate, dodging the porter, like she used to do, just to get the flavor of those old, distasteful days on her tongue again.

Kinsman had the ground floor at No. 7. A middle-aged couple rent it now; the wife watches everyone in and out of the Inn through a pair of opera glasses. In Kinsman's time there were high-art curtains—very dingy—at the windows and tumbled red-and-white dhurries on the floor and blue plates hung by wire along the walls.

He was a languid, artistic chap—played the

violin, hung about old bookstalls and *bric-à-brac* shops in the lanes off Holborn.

He very rarely went to a music hall, avoided rowdy parties, dined out a great deal in the season, and spoke now and then, in an off-hand, half-ashamed way, of his people near Park Lane. There were photographs of society beauties on his mantel-shelf, propped up against Oriental bowls—"pudden basins," his laundress dubbed them scornfully—he gave you to understand that he knew all the beauties personally.

He visited the Conifers, who had a big dingy house in Russell Square. Conifer was a stock-broker, very much absorbed in his business, and Mrs. Conifer was an extremely pretty blonde in the china-doll style. She was the kind of little woman who is called "dressy" by her friends.

You don't know the oppressively respectable side of Bloomsbury. Bloomsbury is altering fast. The change pains me. I wish some fellow who could write would immortalize the old place before it disappears. Every time I go outside the gates of the Inn some change hits me in the face. I see

hoardings with up-to-date posters and the addresses of house-breakers in places where once there was a familiar, flat-faced house, with wide-framed windows. The old shops are going, little fusty shops—eating houses, furniture stores, undertakers. I saw the last typical eating house this morning. There was nothing in the window but a big blue dish—Kinsman would have admired it—and a row of pressed beef tins, with a haddock hanging flabbily over each tin.

Bloomsbury is forever in the violent stage—always going up or down. Directly they took away our exclusive gates and let the cabs run straight through to Kings Cross and Euston, there was an epidemic of boarding houses. I believe that every house in Woburn Place takes lodgers—more or less genteelly. An old fellow who had the first floor set at 3 when I came to the Inn remembered the days when only carriage folk lived in Great James Street. The first professional brass plate on a door ruffled the inhabitants considerably.

Great James Street, Doughty Street, and a few more belong to the Tichborne family. I remember

a charwoman who used to say viciously—at times when she considered herself imposed upon by those she worked for:

"Ah! Wait till Sir Roger comes out o' quod, and then they'll see."

Just now we are aggressively on the up grade. It is much worse than going down. The Duke has determined to make Bloomsbury a superior residential quarter once more. He has pulled down some houses, added a story to others, made gardens of the mews—and ruined the place for all sentimental people. These red-and-white blocks of flats spoil the neighborhood. We are becoming vulgarly opulent. Once you might have drawn a line, roughly, say down Southampton Row, and so divided the oppressively respectable from the aggressively Bohemian. That was so in Mrs. Conifer's time.

She was on the respectable side, of course: where people subscribe to Mudie's and make the changing of books the great business of the day, where the men come home punctually to dinner at seven and the women stroll down Oxford Street regularly on

fine afternoons. You may still see them swarming out of Hanway Street, very well dressed as a rule, and very often Jewesses.

Mrs. Conifer was sometimes dull, so dull that she used to go to a cake shop and have her afternoon tea and listen to the other women's chatter. Here was an opportunity that Kinsman could not miss. Before long she went to his rooms instead of going to the cake shop. It was really much more amusing. The Inn is quiet in the afternoons. A great many of the fellows are in the City, and the laundresses have gone away for the day. Mrs. Conifer used to thread her way through quiet by-ways—down Guilford Street, along monastic Great James Street, across Theobalds Road, and onwards. The gardens were quiet in those days; we did not allow children in until evening. It was so beautifully fresh and still after the roar and dust of outside London, the summer smells of provision shops, and the rattle of omnibuses. Kinsman had shaded windows—it was summer time at first—and a dainty tea. He liked her to come in the afternoons because Sophia Dominy, of whom he was a little

afraid, was safely shut away in the big mantle shop where she was dummy. But by and by Mrs. Conifer came in the evenings also—after dinner, when Conifer had shut himself up for the evening in his study. She used to drive up to the gates on wet nights. I saw her more than once myself—always beautifully dressed and closely veiled, and having that intangible air of shrinking which is natural to the woman who never goes out alone after dark.

And then one night she met Sophia Dominy in the doorway. It was bound to happen. Sophia was a handsome girl with a fine figure—I told you she was dummy at a mantle shop. She came out of the shadow of the doorway as Mrs. Conifer drew into it. It so happened that Kinsman was late home that night; his windows were dark. Mrs. Conifer looked. With her quick woman's eye she took in every detail of this other woman, whose clothes were a pitiful struggle for costly effect—seal plush instead of sealskin, weedy ostrich plumes in her hat, and in her small ears the glitter of red glass. There must have been insolent contempt in her china-blue eyes, for Sophia's great black ones began to blaze,

and she put her hand on the other's slim, nervous shoulder. She said, with an offensive touch of comradeship:

"Good-evening, Mrs. Conifer."

How did she find out? How do women learn these things? *You* can say perhaps—*I* give it up. I only know that Kinsman had been very careful—as careful as a man knows how.

Little blond Mrs. Conifer started, and then stared coldly at the gaudy, tawdry, dark creature in the doorway.

"I—I don't understand," she faltered; "I—excuse me—I do not know you."

She made a weak attempt at dignity, but she looked horribly ashamed and alarmed. She was afraid that the girl knew everything and was going to blackmail her.

"But I know you," returned the other, with a little fierce chuckle of triumph. "I know why you have come here to-night. You ladies give yourself such airs—you are not a bit better than girls like me. If everybody had their rights, I ought to be Mrs. Kinsman. See!"

Mrs. Conifer did see. The whole hideous position was perfectly clear to her, without another word. You won't believe me, of course, but she wasn't a wicked woman. She had simply drifted, like any other idle young woman might. There had been a fascination about Kinsman, with his queerly furnished rooms, his romantic airs of art-worship, sympathy, and so on. She had regarded herself as misunderstood and was inclined to be plaintively melancholy about Conifer's obtuseness. Kinsman had been an affinity. She got the insidious flavor of the Inn. There had been nothing vulgar or wicked about the affair. It had only been delicious, piquant, dangerous—like a leaf torn out of the "Decameron." Sophia Dominy brought everything up to date, brought terrifying visions of the Divorce Court. Mrs. Conifer was a faithful wife again, in every thought, directly she looked into those blazing black eyes and understood.

She whisked round and rustled swiftly in her skirts of silk across the square, getting out at the Holborn end and plunging into the stream of people on the pavement flowing westward. So soon as the

first tightness was out of her throat and the first desperate trembling had left her limbs she hailed a hansom, telling the man to stop at the corner of Russell Square. She fell back quivering on the seat and shut her eyes, but opened them again directly because the face of Sophia rose before her—triumphant, grinning, pale with chalk, and hidden to the thick brows with a coarse fuzz of hair.

She went tottering up her own doorsteps. As she slipped along the hall, and past the study door, Conifer called out:

"Is that you, Freda?"

"Yes, it is I."

"Come in."

She stepped over the threshold and stood in the warm room, her pale head hanging and her half-shut eyes filled with dread. She forced herself to look up at last and to stammer out:

"We drove down to Terry's Theater, Mrs. Hart and I. But the house was full—so—so we drove back. That is all—really."

Conifer was sitting over the big table as usual, and as usual it was strewn with papers. But the double

knot of anxiety was untied from above his eyes and the packets of paper were pushed back. There was a new tenderness on his face, or, rather, the revival of on old one.

"I'm glad you came back," he said. "I've got time to talk to you to-night, darling. I shall have time to take you about again myself. I've been awfully worried lately about business—you wouldn't understand, it would only bother you. But I was afraid once that it meant ruin. I've been in a very tight place. But it's all right now."

He set back his shoulders and sighed, as if he threw off at that moment the burden of months.

"I shall," he repeated, laughing foolishly, "have time for *you* now."

Mrs. Conifer's pretty, weak face stiffened into horror. She was thinking of the quiet Inn, with its perpetual, sanctified taste of cloisters and the Middle Ages; thinking of Kinsman's rooms, with the high-art furbelows, the violin under the table, the untidy dhurries on the floor, the impressionist daubs which he had painted himself and hung on the wall to keep the blue plates company. She thought of

the black, dingy doorway, of the girl with the savage face and the twinkling earrings.

"Talk to me." Conifer, who had shut the door carefully, half lifted her into the great chair by the fire and stretched himself at her feet on the rug, like a faithful dog.

Their eyes met; his full of worship, hers of lava-like tears.

"You love me?" she asked incredulously, the frozen look creeping more stiffly over her face. "I —I began to think——"

She looked such a small, shrunken thing—as he told her afterward—that he felt quite anxious and remorseful.

"Love!" he cried out boyishly; "I should think I did. Only business worries, you know, darling, enchain a man. He can't be always saying it."

He took her in his arms. She shivered as he kissed her, taking her full punishment from his ardent lips. She had loved him all along—only him. She thought of Kinsman, in his stuffy, wooden room, with a fierce, ashamed loathing. She kept quiet a little, her head on her husband's breast

and his lips just flicking her face now and then. At last she broke out beseechingly:

"Let us go away for a holiday."

"Very good idea. When?"

"To-night—to-morrow, I mean. And, Dick—"

"Yes."

"Let's give up this house and go into the country. You can have a pony trap and a season ticket."

"That isn't half a bad idea," he responded lazily—he was too happy to be positive or vehement about anything. "The rent here is very high and I don't see what we get for it."

. . . . .

They went abroad for two months, and when they returned they took a house somewhere in Surrey. They lived there for four years—with a pony trap, a man for the garden, and all the other accessories of rural gentility. Mrs. Conifer was very happy. She had two charming children. She was in the third best set—the set which draws the line at tenant farmers, but thinks it rather a privilege to be invited to the Vicarage.

She never thought of Kinsman, of that dazed,

magic time when she had been a traitor to Dick. She only heard of him twice—once when they saw his name in the newspaper—co-respondent in a divorce suit or something of that sort—and wondered if it were the same man—*their* Kinsman—casually over dinner.

That was all. Except for that, she never gave Kinsman a thought, not even a shudder. She was too happy, too prosperous, too busy. She had her children. She had also her dogs, her bees, her poultry—all the live things that women gather about them in the country, to take the place of shopping. She had her little social excitements—summer garden parties and winter hockey. She had her little heart-burnings and triumphs—being snubbed by this woman or dropping that one.

But one day when she was out alone on her bicycle she came upon Kinsman in a lane near the house. He was very shabby, obviously very down on his luck. She remembered all at once that he had never given her back her letters—those foolish, imprudent letters in which she had bared her soul. She gripped the handle bars of her machine desper-

ately. He was standing in her path. For a moment she had a wild plan of running him down. But the next moment her foot was on the ground. She had dismounted and faced him.

That was the first of many meetings. He was on his last legs, he was absolutely unscrupulous, and he regularly bled the poor little woman. Once her husband commented on her shabby hat, offered to raise her allowance, and gave her five sovereigns to go on with. The yellow coins dropped like burning blood into her palm. Twice a week she met Kinsman in the lane—Kinsman, shabby and dissolute and a blackmailer. I don't know what he had been up to in those four years, something queer, no doubt. He was always a bit of an enigma. He cleaned her out at last. She had to tell him that she could not give him another penny. It was in the lane as usual. A wet, sodden October afternoon. The sky was gray and unrelenting, like Kinsman's face. When they parted, after a piteous scene on her part, it was on the understanding that he would come to the house that night and give her husband those letters. That was all.

On her way home she met one or two people—her best friends. They chatted a bit of little social things—the hockey ball, a wedding, to which she had not been asked, some new people at a house on the hill, on whom nobody had yet called.

That afternoon she did not change her dress, but went indoors and threw herself on the drawing-room sofa in her short, bicycling skirt. In front of the window she faced was a cherry tree, its boughs bent by the wind and its long, dry leaves floating yellow to the grass. She tried to form her plans. Would Dick turn her out that night? It was beginning to rain; inside, the fire was cheery. The room had never looked so nice. Her wild eyes roved over her little cherished gimcracks on the tables—the dainty rubbish that housekeepers accumulate and love. When she heard wheels outside she did not rise. She was afraid. Perhaps Kinsman had stopped the trap on the way from the station. But Dick came in and gave her the usual temperate kiss and asked in the usual hearty way how the youngsters were and whether dinner was going to be punctual. He sat sprawling in slippers

and an old coat by the fire, saying comfortably what a rough night it was and how the wind had lashed into his eyes as he drove home.

She turned on her cushions and watched him. He was growing fat and bald—there were prosperous, uninteresting curves all over him. He had ripened into a flourishing business man who liked his dinner and a good cigar, who considered his wife as one of his comforts—and very little more. But she loved him. How she loved him! Would he send her away that night?

He was mumbling sleepily that it was not fit weather in which to turn a dog out. Would he turn her out? Would he let her take the baby?

She stared out at the autumn sky and tossing trees; in, at the firelight chasing round the warm, picture-loaded walls. Where would to-morrow find her? To-morrow she would be an outcast.

All the time her ears were pricking for the door bell and, when it clanged, she started to her feet, with a choking sound in her dry throat. Her face was clay above the severe line of her rigidly cut cloth bodice. The bell rang again. She got up and al-

most crawled toward that deep chair by the fire and kissed her husband—a kiss of relinquishment. He patted her hair and looked at her in lazy surprise. Then he said in a voice of mild irritation:

"That can't be Crook" (he was the curate). "He said he'd look in one night for a game of chess. But I didn't ask him to dinner, and he surely wouldn't turn out in such weather. I hope it isn't Crook. I want to do some work to-night."

He glanced at his black bag, which was bloated with papers which he had brought from the City.

Mrs. Conifer looked at it too—resentfully. She was thinking, with her woman's logic, that it was this ardent devotion to business on her husband's part which had made her drift. If he had not, in the Russell Square days, brought home that bag so often, she would not be in such a pitiable plight to-night. There was a hurried opening of doors downstairs, voices in the hall, then a sharp report and another.

Mrs. Conifer shrieked. Her husband pulled himself out of the depths of the chair and rushed downstairs. Presently she stole after him, her

legs like lead and her wild heart thumping in her throat.

The hall was brightly lighted with a red and yellow light, filtering through colored glass lanterns. Face downward on the tesselated floor was the body of a man, his prone head in a pool. The door was flung back. Black night outside and the sob of the wind!

Two men, the gardener and another, lifted something from the step and carried it in. Mrs. Conifer dragged herself forward. The world swung round with her—they were bringing in another woman. They stretched her beside the man—a woman with the wreck of a gaudy black beauty. It was a face which Mrs. Conifer had seen once—in the doorway of the Inn, the face of Sophia Dominy, her savior.

The servants were telling Dick how it happened. Kinsman had called and asked for him. The woman must have been close behind. As he stepped across the threshold she fired, then turned the weapon to her own head.

Kinsman was always a puzzle. What had he been doing in the intervening four years? How

had he disgraced himself? Had Sophia been with him all the time? No one will ever know. One thing only is certain; that Sophia, who was a very jolly, good sort of girl, had been bitterly jealous of Mrs. Conifer.

Dead eyes blankly regarding her; blood circling sluggishly on the floor; October wind moaning in and lifting sadly the draggled end of smartness on the poor girl's dress!

She lost all control, drew her shaking hands from her breast, and gave a long cry of horror and despair. She couldn't even be grateful for her escape—couldn't realize it. Dick turned. He saw her there for the first time. He put an arm about her and led her upstairs—to the firelit room, with the open piano, the bowls of autumn flowers, and the pleasant litter of magazines. She flung herself into his arms, choking with emotion.

"My God!" she gasped—suddenly, horribly vehement for so childish and dainty a creature—"if—if—if——"

She was on the verge of a confession, but Dick's trust was so complete that he thought her merely

hysterical—as well she might be. He lifted her distorted face from its burrow in his coat and put his wife with tender insistence on the sofa.

"There, there," he said, patting her softly. "Don't you give way. It's a beastly business. What the deuce could poor Kinsman have wanted with me? I must go, dearie; there is a great deal to be arranged. I'll send one of the maids to look after you."

"No," she cried sharply, "I want to be alone."

He kissed her and went away. After a little she heard him leave the house. Then the baby wailed in the room above and the nurse crooned it quiet. She heard the tramp of feet in the hall; heard the study door shut stealthily, and guessed what this dread, subdued bustle meant.

She got up stiffly and went round and round the room, taking up every little toy from the tables thoughtfully, arranging mats and flowers—touching everything with a wistful clinging because it had been spared to her. And then she suddenly re-

membered—remembered that she was not quite safe yet.

Everything downstairs was still. She stole to the door and listened. Then she pattered out onto the landing, stooped down, and taking off her slippers carried them in her hand. She crept down the stairs—cursing the steady tick of the tall clock, the rustle of her silk petticoat. She reached the study and waited outside the door for a moment. She was gathering courage to save her honor. She turned the handle at last. Someone had lighted the lamp—the reading lamp with the green shade. It cast a faint yellowish flicker on the horrible shrouded things that were stretched, side by side, on the big table.

In the drawer of that table Conifer kept a flask of brandy. She took it out and tipped some of the blazing spirit down her throat. It nerved her to peel the sheet from Kinsman's face, to draw it lower, to thrust her delicate hand, heavy with Conifer's jewels, into the inner pocket of the dead man's coat and steal her letters.

Then she drew the sheet back—heart, hand, and

head heavy with recollection. All sorts of minor things flashed through her dizzy head—things which had been romantic, daring, delightful at the time—which she exaggerated now into deadly sins, never, never to be wiped out. At Sophia she did not look. But her light blue eyes fixed on Kinsman. His thin lips seemed to have taken a mocking curve —although she had the best of the game. His mouth was shut forever and her letters were back in her own possession. She tucked them into her bodice, remembered to pick up her slippers from the floor, and stole away.

There was a servant in the drawing room tending the fire; there was another, as she could hear, busy in the bedrooms, preparing for the night. But the nurse was downstairs and the nurseries were empty, except for the sleeping children.

She crept in, looking furtively round the firelit walls. She went over to the hearth, dug the unclean letters fiercely in, and watched them burn. There was a little white frock airing on the guard. She took it up in her hot hands and kissed it. Toys were all over the floor; one, a fur monkey

with one eye missing and the other fiery-red, seemed to blink up malignantly—and as if it knew and would one day tell her children.

She went into the night nursery and looked at two small heads and two small bodies curled under flowery eider downs. The children were both babies under three. There were toys here too and little socks that she had knitted. These two rooms filled her with a wilder misery and terror than she had known before, because she had been so near losing those little heads on the pillows.

Heavy with shame, thinking of those two—*things*—below, she slipped to the floor and tried to pray—for the souls of the dead and the peace of the living. But her knees stiffened. She stumbled to her feet, moaning. A grotesque memory beat in on her. She remembered the old superstition—that no witch could shed a tear; that this was the witches' most bitter punishment. Well, here was hers. She could not pray. She had sinned, but she had come through the fire. She was faithful to Conifer with a double fervor. She had a high constancy and love which the mere faithful wife, who has never

been tempted, cannot attain. Still—she must bear the burden—of an interlude—all her days.

. . . . .

She was out of sorts for a long time afterward—taking no interest in her bees, her poultry,—they are rose-comb Andalusians, she told me impressively,—or her children. The local doctor said that her nerves were all wrong. He recommended raw eggs and a thorough change. Conifer has brought her up to town. He has been taking her the round of the theaters—French plays, farces—imagine her sitting through them! On this, her first free night—he's dining with a City company—she came to me! came creeping through the Inn in the old way, because she couldn't help it.

What an impulsive, delightful, compromising fool a true woman is! I only met her twice—for a minute, by accident—with Kinsman—and yet she came to me to-night. Put herself absolutely in my power. I might blackmail her as Kinsman did. I might tell Conifer. Fortunately for her I shan't.

She sat and talked, elaborated every detail, shredded every sensation, just as Pray did. I wish

these remorseful, perplexed, sinned against and sinning people would not come to me. They shove their skeletons in my face, rattling every bone, speaking of the past—always, always the past—to a fellow who wants to keep young, who doesn't feel his age.

MORTGAGED.

I HAVE told you about Kinsman—his china and oak, his flirtations—never from the heart—his downfall and sorry end.

Poor Kinsman! Like most born bad lots he was a charming companion. If it had not been for the apocryphal aristocratic connections to whom he persistently alluded, he would have been perfect. He was so charmingly enthusiastic over his curios; such a solemn enthusiasm—the only earnest thing about him.

Yet over the affair of that one supreme curio he kept rigid silence. He told me; but it was a couple of years later—when the Inn had ceased to talk about Harrowsmith. A couple of years later! By then Kinsman had lived down the first strength of his angry regret. He told me fully, lovingly, sadly, opening out his passionate collector's soul. He made me understand the full virility of those odd emotions which had once fired and wasted him.

Yes. He was silent enough while the affair was in progress. That odd, weird, inanimate affair! How little any of us suspected the nature of the struggle that was going on behind his constantly sported oak.

It was in this way. Let me begin, as he began, with his introduction to the brown, burly god which gained possession of him.

Harrowsmith asked him to lunch one Saturday. After lunch he brought out cigars; he had money and could afford them daily. To him cigar-smoking was a habit, not an occasional indulgence.

The last course of the luncheon still stood on the table, which the two men had pushed well back so that they might rest their feet upon the fender. It was a hard March day; a day of penetrating wind. The draughts licked under the door and danced between the carpet and the shrunken boards. Outside in the square the only sound was the savage "boo" of the young spring gale.

Harrowsmith's fripperies—of photographs and gimcrack furniture in the lightest and latest style—appeared meager in the ancient room of his cham-

bers—the little room with the heavily corniced ceiling and paneled walls. These fripperies, which he considered showed taste, were in the light of a personal affront to the solid oak cabinet against the wall immediately opposite the fireplace. Kinsman, of course, found this piece of furniture the only thing that he could look at with tolerance. He had been invited to meet it—to give his expert opinion on it.

He kept turning his head and looking pityingly, covetously at it. He felt sorry for it, set as it was among modern cabinet-making and garish ornament. It was passing through a period of degradation, this stout cabinet of oak which had lived most likely for a couple of centuries in some manor house. He thought that it must surely feel its shame of contact. He couldn't take his eyes off it. Once he found himself fancifully wishing that he wore blinkers like a horse so that he might shut out Harrowsmith's other effects.

"It's beautiful, beautiful," he sighed, shading his eyes with his hands and staring straight at the wall. "It's original, every bit, even the cornice. I should

like to know its history. If these old things could only talk!"

"It's all he left me. I expected a thousand at least," grumbled Harrowsmith.

Kinsman was still ardently drinking in the solid beauty of the cabinet—with its linen-patterned panels. One never saw carving of that pattern save on Tudor work. The thing was late Tudor. It was unique—and yet this materialistic doctor was not satisfied. He gazed at the glowing brown wood, at the slim posts supporting the upper cupboard, at the cunning hinges of iron. Never had he thrown at a woman so heart-whole a glance.

"I wish a rich uncle would leave me such a thing," he sighed. "Why, man, money won't buy it. You may wait, you may search a lifetime, and not find such a well-preserved specimen of the period."

"Oh, yes, I know you have the old-oak craze. But I like smart, modern stuff. I like pretty things about me. You understand? What would that fetch at auction?"

Harrowsmith took the cigar out of his mouth

and pointed it, with its long, trembling tip of ash, toward the cabinet.

"Impossible to say. So much depends. But you surely wouldn't sell it?"

"If I could get a good price. Why not?"

Kinsman had never before felt so deeply the disadvantages of poverty. Fate, which had given him an unsuccessful father, which had chained him to a clerk's stool in a City office, had further cursed him with a fine taste in art. He knew a good thing by instinct. He trifled with *bric-à-brac,* with Chippendale; he had an eye for the voluptuous coloring of the Empire period; but his best affections he reserved for oak. All the rest was thin, unsatisfying. In oak, despite the poverty which allowed him to criticise, but rarely to buy, he was a connoisseur. He could tell—blindfold—by a caressing turn of his hands about the different members, if a piece of oak furniture were original or if it were some bastard thing built together from old wood for the hoodwinking of people with money and a fashionable desire for the antique. How savagely I've heard him disclaim against people of that sort!

He got up. The slim pillars seemed to draw him —to wink and beckon and plead.

"Why don't you buy it off me?" Harrowsmith asked, idly watching him and looking contemptuously amused.

He spoke with the carelessness of a man to whom money is not of immediate moment. He wheeled round in his chair and took a long, sulky look at the oak. It irritated him. It took up room. More than that, it was reminiscent of disappointment. His Uncle Bob had always promised to remember him in his will. He didn't consider that a Tudor cabinet was remembrance—enough.

"You shall have it for thirty pounds," he said.

Kinsman did not answer. He grew pale. The hand that was running about the rich wood twitched nervously.

Harrowsmith misunderstood his silence, and said, with slight asperity:

"Is that too much for you? To get rid of the thing I'll say twenty-five."

"Twenty-five!" You may be sure there was a

catch in Kinsman's voice. "It would be cheap at thirty. But you know that I could as easily raise three hundred. How can a poor beggar save out of five pounds a week?"

Harrowsmith shrugged and said, "I shall get a dealer in. Can you recommend one? You're hand in glove with all those fellows. I hate the thing. It's too heavy. It dwarfs the room."

Kinsman with his finger was tracing the panels. He threw a look of desperation, of pleading even, at the oak, as if he thought that a thing which had been so long in the world and had witnessed the perplexities of so many generations was really sentient and could suggest. As he looked, his cheeks flushed, his lips smiled, and his whole attitude became suddenly *débonnaire*.

He returned to the fire, walking ludicrously sideways, as if he were afraid to take his eyes off the cabinet—the wise, resourceful cabinet. It *had* suggested. He suddenly remembered. He became confused, dizzy, elated with remembrance. He could buy it—if not with coin of the realm, with something equally marketable. Harrowsmith h

said it was marketable. He would buy it. Why not? Within his own body he carried the means to buy—his own imperfect, freakish body!

"Do you remember," he asked, in the hurried, jerky tones of a clock that is out of gear, "the offer you once made me?"

Harrowsmith looked perplexed, and then his face lighted.

"To buy your body—yes."

"Does it still hold good?"

The doctor stared. Then he laughed and poked the fire until the hot light ran round the room, and, darting down the panels of the cabinet, made it wink and beckon more than before.

"You didn't like the idea," he said at last.

"Your Uncle Bob hadn't left you the cabinet then," Kinsman reminded him pointedly.

"That's ingenious. I see, I see. You propose to sell yourself—for a bit of wood."

"I should be a fool if I didn't. You want my body after I am dead because it differs in some slight detail from other bodies, because, dead, I shall be to you medical fellows a curio. That's grim."

"A curio, exactly—to use your own fanciful term," said Harrowsmith, professional enthusiasm lighting its cold taper in his eye. "And I, as you know, have made a special study of the thorax. Are you really serious?"

"Absolutely. I'll give you my body when I've done with it if you'll give me the cabinet at once."

Harrowsmith looked at his watch and jumped up.

"It's not quite four," he said. "Kent, the commissioner for oaths, on the ground floor, has probably not gone. He stays late. You must sign a document of some sort. He'll draw it up. I like to have things in form. In the event of your predeceasing me——"

"I'm yours. Yes; that's all right. If I die first," assented Kinsman carelessly. He was amused and scornful in his turn at an interest which was to him inexplicable.

He thought the doctor a fool. He was also positively grateful to his singular thorax. Men with normal organs could not always afford Tudor furniture. Over his enthusiastic face slid the expres-

sion of a personal greeting as he gave a full look at the cabinet and saluted it.

"You've got a bargain," Harrowsmith said. "You'll be able to sell the thing, when you are tired of it, at a profit."

Kinsman winced. The first hint of shadow drew his brows together.

"Sell it! Why, I'd sell myself first. No joke intended. By Jove! I *have* sold myself."

They both laughed—laughter that tripped and tumbled down the old, wide stairs; laughter that was caught up by the rough wind outside and carried —whither?

. . . . .

For some weeks Kinsman had his silent chuckle against Harrowsmith. He told himself that this was mean and narrow. He struggled against his jubilation and his contemptuous reflection that the doctor was a fool. He tried to regard him as a fellow-enthusiast—with a different objective. He wished to avoid the narrow outlook of the average collector. He imagined that his flirtations with china, with Empire lounges and candelabra, with the

tapering legs of Chippendale chairs had made him tolerant and broadly sympathetic. Evidently it was not so. He looked at his cabinet; he thought of his eccentric thorax—which, after all, Harrowsmith might never possess—and again, silently, in the seclusion of his own rooms, he chuckled.

After dinner each night, as he sat and smoked, he stole frequent moments for the cabinet. He jumped up now and then imagining that he had discovered some new minute detail in the work. Or he opened the doors and stuck his head far into the cavernous cupboards. They exhaled an aromatic perfume. Perhaps some woman had once kept Eastern embroideries there; this was a superficial speculation which he afterward discarded as being unworthy and improbable. He finally decided that it had been used as a linen press—linen folded away with lavender; or a thrifty housewife had stored within choice apples. It was the perfume of old orchards that teased his nostrils.

He tried to supply the cabinet with a history. Harrowsmith could tell him nothing except that his Uncle Bob had bought it at a sale. Sometimes he

looked at it so long, so ardently, that he almost thought he was on the point of drawing from the massive brown thing the secrets of dead generations.

He could never tell me the exact momentous occasion when the first faint chill of repugnance struck him. He did remember the night when, as he came home tired from the City, and cast his eyes on the cabinet as usual, it seemed insufficient for the first time. What was it, after all, to make so much fuss about? Had he paid too great a price? Until that moment he had never given one thought to the price.

In the evenings, smoking his cigarette, one hand loose on his knee, he asked himself how that hand would look—dead. Involuntarily he stiffened it. Perhaps it was the slowly rising horror in him which made it appear whiter than it ever had been before. His hand! He was sorry for it. His body! What an injustice he had done it. Had any man the right to rob his body of the sanctity and superb solitude which come after death? The meanest wretch living retained the right to that majestic aloofness. He had mortgaged his. The first seeds of hate and fear sprouted in his heart.

He dashed out of his chambers and went down Chancery Lane into Fleet Street. He walked west to a theater. The play was a tragedy. As he sat in the pit he laughed when the other people thrilled. He then looked in amazement at the scandalized faces surrounding him.

He had left his chambers without casting a farewell look at the cabinet, without murmuring some word of admiration. This had never happened before. He became grave. He reproached himself. He was tender with foolish little penitences—as one would be with a loved woman.

That night in his bed the grewsome fancy seized him to lie straight and still, hands folded and chin well up. That's how he would lie when he was dead —the majesty of death. But in his case it would be a mere tinsel majesty—like the amusingly solemn antics of a gypsy monarch. He was not his own.

He got up and lit the light and smoked. He was ashamed of himself. He was afraid of himself, and of Harrowsmith and of the cabinet. They were a dread trio, banded in a terrible way.

The fire was quite dead. He felt his way across

the room and put his unsteady hand on the thick oak panels of the cabinet. He put his head against one and groaned. The perfume—was it of lavender? —stole out and nauseated him.

He would sell it. He must sell it. He went back to bed. He considered. Which dealer would give the best price? He would sell it. He would take his annual holiday early; he evidently wanted a thorough change.

In the morning he wondered how he could have thought of selling it. The acquisitiveness, the unreasoning, improvident, ardent affection of the collector was strong in him again. Before he went to the City he examined the cabinet as usual, gloating and thrilling over its beauty.

But at night he was again seized with foreboding so dreadful that he dashed into the flowing streets. He went to a music hall. He grinned, a fixed, wide grin, that seemed to crack his cheeks. His face felt stiff. The faces of the dead were stiff.

He thought that he would ask Harrowsmith to break the compact, to take back his legacy. But the doctor had a professional ardor. He might

bluntly refuse. Also—he could not part with the cabinet.

The next day was Saturday. All the afternoon he walked miserably about the London streets. He thought he'd enlist, get sent to the front, and be killed on a battlefield. So would he save his dead flesh from ribald attention. But perhaps Harrowsmith would not let him go.

He was afraid to go back to his chambers, afraid that he might meet Harrowsmith on the stairs, afraid of the cabinet. He turned into a tea shop and found with difficulty a vacant chair at one of the tables. The life and gayety and warmth of that tea shop reassured him. He despised himself for his morbid fears. He would be a fool if he threw up his berth and went to the front. Besides, if he went he must leave the cabinet. The touch and sight of the wonderful brown wood carved by hands that had so long been dust had become a daily necessity to him.

Next morning, when he awoke, he was feeling very ill. It was doubtless influenza. There was no danger in that if one took care. He would take

care. He must. He dared not die. Death now had a bitterness double distilled. All that Sunday he lay miserably in bed. As the hours wore on he grew too ill to fear death—and after. He was too ill, even, to be haunted by his usual terror when dusk fell.

Next day his laundress came to light the fire. He sent her off with a telegram to the office, saying he could not come. She happened to meet Harrowsmith on the landing and sent him in on her own initiative.

The doctor was assiduous. He was good to us all, and only grew angry if we spoke of a fee. He muttered something about nervous breakdown. He provided a trained nurse; he paid professional visits twice a day.

With care and nursing Kinsman began to be himself again. Harrowsmith told him that he must get away for a rest. He added that he would go with him; a holiday together would be splendid. No doubt he wondered at the wild, leaping terror in the other's eyes when he said that; said it in such a cheery, commonplace way, without any subtlety.

But Kinsman was subtle and suspicious and mad. He thought the doctor wished to come too, so as to be sure of him. He read the most diabolical eagerness in his calm face. How afraid he was of Harrowsmith! And how afraid Harrowsmith was that he would be the loser on their strange compact. Afraid to let him go away alone in case he should die and be buried.

His dread and hate grew and grew; it became distorted into a monster. He now hesitated before he swallowed each dose of medicine. His light head became the dwelling-place of a hundred wild thoughts. He lay with his face to the wall and saw it all as clearly as possible—with preternatural clearness. Harrowsmith wanted to kill him. He was impatient; that was only natural. But he *would* not die. Sometimes, when the nurse came near, he desperately clutched at her hand to save him, to pull him back. He must live. He must spare his flesh—his poor flesh, at which he looked yearningly as it lay against the bed linen, wan and veined.

Once he thought desperately that rather than die

he would kill Harrowsmith first—with the last spurt of energy left him. Yes. In any case, when he grew strong, he would certainly kill him as a safeguard; a man could not live in such perpetual terror.

His face to the wall, he reproached himself bitterly with his headlong passion for the cabinet. What was there in old oak to lure a man to such madness? It added nothing to life. What was life but decent provision and the certainty of a long, undisturbed death? Things seemed simple and clear as he lay dozing through the days.

If he had sold himself for bread that would have been more understandable, less reprehensible. Starvation was a very terrible thing. But he had sold himself—for what? He thought with weird dread and passion of that solemn, shining brown thing through the wall—the mysterious piece of ancient furniture that was responsible for his misery.

And so, by desperate will, as he thought, he lived. He grew strong. The trained nurse went away. The last bottle of medicine was empty.

He was alone and would be until the morning. This was the first evening he had been alone since

his illness. At dusk the old familiar terror gripped him. He was beginning to be afraid, and this time he could not dart like a hunted creature into the streets and join his fellow-men—men whose bodies belonged to them; men who had not mortgaged their last sad majesty. He was alone, alone. On the shawl which wrapped his knees his folded hands looked oddly pale.

He walked across the room and touched the cabinet. Long stay in bed had numbed his feet. He touched the cabinet. In his throat was a desperate sob.

He would sell it. Sell! That was just what he could never do. But if only he could; if only he might buy himself back.

Sell! He imagined the joy of the buyer—a collector, of course. What pure, undiluted ecstasy he would get out of it—that man who paid with gold and not with his own helpless flesh! No; he could never sell it. Beautiful, devilish, compelling thing! It must stay with him until the end.

He opened the door and smelt the smell clinging aroma which had always tant

piqued him. He traced with his finger the rude hinges of hammered iron. His face quivered in every muscle with varied emotions. How he loved this thing! How he hated and feared it! What moments of joy it had afforded him! What a fearful league it had lured him into making!

A terrible struggle was passing over him. His freakish brain had suggested a new extravagance. He was possessed with a desire to do this strange, this futile and dastardly act. He lifted his head and looked at the cabinet as he would have looked into human eyes—a long, wistful look; a look embodying a whole gamut of emotions. Then he crossed the room, stooped down to a box in one corner, and came back with a hammer.

"It will hurt you," he said foolishly, the hammer already uplifted, his eyes drinking in the delicacy of that wonderful thing which had traveled down the past ages and drifted to him and been his tempter, "but not as it hurts me."

He struck. All night he worked with the hammer, with every tool he had that could help him. He began to break it up, to hack it asunder—his

cabinet. He threw it on the fire bit by bit. It blazed and crackled, this old dry wood. The splutter and crackle went to his heart. He thought they were agonized protests. He believed that it suffered as it died. In his long morbid communion with it he had grown to believe it human and something more.

It took him days and nights to kill the cabinet. It was so stoutly built. When he was exhausted he crept to bed, not forgetting to lock the door on that scene of strange disorder. But at last it was done. The wall behind was bare and dirty, festooned with cobwebs. On the floor was dust and chips and splinters. The fire burned with the glowing heat of a sacrificial fire.

Already he was calmer. Although he still belonged to Harrowsmith, although he had madly destroyed the one thing that might have redeemed him, although his days would now hold bitter moments, he was at peace.

He watched it burn. He saw the wondrous handicraft of cunning dead men disappear line by line, and turn to ash.

He was sitting so when his laundress came in at the widely flung door. It was the first time for days that she had been permitted to enter the sitting room. He nervously expected her to exclaim, to inquire. The blank wall was so obvious. The little room was hot like an oven, but she only flung her hands and cried out:

"Oh, lor'! what an awful thing this is about Mr. 'Arrersmith. To be knocked down by one o' them cycles. The streets of London aint safe. And 'im a doctor, too, the cleverest doctor at the 'orspital."

"What—*what* about him?"

"Knocked down by a cycle and killed in Grays Inn Road, jest by the 'orspital," she returned with flavor.

Kinsman staggered to his feet. The fire licked out from the grate and seemed to sear him, to dry the words in his throat and dam up the glad accursed tears in his eyes.

He was no longer a bondman. He was free. He could bear to look at his flesh, his own until death, and after. He looked at his hands, torn and soiled, hands that had destroyed the cabinet.

His eyes fell on the last panel, which the fire was greedily eating; on the heap of ash that had meant so much beauty.

He dropped back in the chair. He laughed—laughter that gurgled with water as it fought its way through his throat. He could not see the blank wall for tears, whether for the cabinet, the dead man, or himself he did not know.

A POLITICAL WOMAN.

GULLY and his wife had one of the new sets just inside the gates. These sets are more expensive, more convenient, more respectable than the old ones. Lucinda—she was Gully's wife—would never have consented to an old set. She set her face sternly against Bohemianism when it took a certain form. She didn't object to it in the form of Liberty tea-gowns and discreet flirtations in the name of art and literature. Gully was a journalist. He found the Inn convenient, but Lucinda was always hoping plaintively that some day they would be able to afford a house in Bloomsbury, or, better still, a modest place in the country.

She had six rooms, every convenience, and a most superior maidservant, the long streamers of whose cap, when she ran out to post a letter, lent a certain *cachet* to the Inn.

Lucinda was nice enough. Her struggles for a conventional manner of life were amusing. She

never gave Gully any peace. She dragged him about to social functions. She made him use his influence to get her portrait in the ladies' papers, as assistant at a charity concert or exhibitor at a cat show—she kept a couple of wild-looking Persians. She always had her photograph taken in evening dress. She was one of those coarse women—commonly called fine—who are disfigured by a big neck and big arms.

She had her "At-Home" day, of course. She displayed a card bowl on a prominent table in the pleasant room overlooking the gardens which she called her drawing room. She peppered the conversation with references to dinners and receptions that she had been invited to.

We were never allowed to smoke in the drawing room, nor to bring in our whisky. It was a modern drawing room, all white paint, cheap china, and cushion frills. She had a standard lamp with an amazing amber shade. She spent sixpence twice a week on cut flowers, and sold Gully's old clothes for palms. It was a very fair attempt at Maida Vale—Lucinda and her drawing room.

Therefore it was a surprise to me when Gully came round one night and said despondently:

"I wish you could help me with Lucinda. She's going all to pieces."

"Going to pieces!"

I thought of dressmakers' bills, of the minor journalists who sometimes dropped in to tea. Yet Lucinda was a safe woman. She was far too respectable to run into debt or to compromise herself. Gully proceeded to explain.

"You know she makes me walk in the Park every Sunday afternoon. She wants to go in the morning when the fashionable frocks are about. But I draw the line at that. We compromise with the afternoon—when there is only the band and pretty shop girls I don't so much mind. We were there six weeks ago, and we stopped to listen to a Socialist spouter—one of those rabid enthusiasts in a red tie. We had listened to them all—the religious ones, the atheists, the philosophers. Sometimes you get good copy out of fellows like that.

"I wouldn't let her stand about long. Her chest is weak, and the Wigans' fancy-dress ball is coming

on. It is to be a grand affair; they've talked of it for months. Lucinda was to go as a—blest if I can remember as what—but her bodice was to be the merest apology. You can't blame a fine woman for showing off her neck and arms. Old Wigan is the proprietor of my paper, a very wealthy man, a very influential one too. It is to my interest to keep in with him. It would never do for us to snub him by keeping away. You're never safe in journalism. Get a post as editor, and begin to bound on your so many hundreds a year. Phew! the paper changes hands or politics—where are you? Get regular weekly features, make yourself an authority on some subject or other. The public doesn't want your subject—or you. Journalism is rotten, I tell you, rotten. Only the absolutely unscrupulous, or the totally ignorant, have the least chance. I know men in journalism who are making five pounds a week and more by writing gutter stuff. And I know clever men who barely scrape a hundred and fifty a year.

"Where was I? Oh! Lucinda. I know that her bronchial attacks last half through the winter, so I

pulled her away out of the crowd. It was a bitterly cold day.

"We walked off. She drew up the collar of her coat. I said that it had been foolish of us to stand about in the cold and risk bronchitis, with the Wigans' fancy-dress ball coming on.

"'I don't care a bit about the ball," she said. 'I'm not going.'

"'Not care! not going! But your dress? You've bought the silk. It cost a pretty penny.'

"'Brocade. Twelve and six a yard,' she groaned.

"'It seemed to me a little stiff. But so long as you are happy——'

"'Happy! Did you hear what he said? It is dreadful.'

"'Awful. The police ought to put a stop to——'

"It was Lucinda who stopped—on the edge of the Serpentine.

"'Do you know what you are saying?' she demanded.

"I didn't like the contemptuous curl of her lip, and returned with some pique:

"'I know what *he* was saying. Extravagant balderdash! I ought to know something about politics. I take an interest in them—an intelligent interest. I write about them. There's my weekly letter to the Midland daily, isn't there? I vote Radical, I'm a Progressive. I'm for the amelioration of—all sorts of things.'

"I wound up vaguely. You can't talk sane, serious politics to your wife; the true political woman has yet to be born.

"'When we retire to the country in our ripe middle age,' I went on, 'I shall take an active interest in local affairs. I shall become a member of the parish council; shall look after rights of way and be down on barbed wire. I've my own ideas on the game laws—we shall never have enough money to preserve—and lots of things. I won't dilate on them. You wouldn't understand.'

"It was getting dusk. In the distance the crowd —all the little crowds—were melting away. A soldier sat with a girl on a seat. His red coat was warm against the shadows.

"'There!' broke out Lucinda passionately, be-

fore we were out of hearing. 'Did you see those two on the seat?'

"'I did. I thought, so far as I could judge, you know, that they looked uncommonly happy.'

"'Happy! a soldier! a servant girl! What have they done? Surely you, as a practical politician, can tell me. Why should they be born to such a life? I ask you. No gleam of brightness to lighten the impenetrable gloo——'

"'Come now. You are quoting the maniac in the red tie.'

"'We got out of the Park and went along Oxford Street in silence until we were near the Circus. Then Lucinda burst out suddenly:

"'Two thousand acres of land——'

"'If you are going to tackle the agricultural problem——'

"'One third of the available capital——'

"'Don't start on statistics; nothing more treacherous.'

"'How many families did he say lived in one room?'

"'Wasn't listening.'

"'That is just it. People like you never do listen. People like you content themselves with reading stupid, woolly, political speeches. For my part, I always skip such things, and am thankful when Parliament adjourns and they put something really interesting in the papers.'"

Gully stopped and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"From that day," he said solemnly, when he had refilled and lighted up, "she has given me no peace. She'll compromise herself seriously—that's what I'm afraid of. She's been making election rosettes. She actually met a fellow by appointment in Broad Street. One of these Social Democrats; she wants me to review his book, 'The Fall of the Capitalist.' I put my foot down when it came to appointments —the scoundrel!

"She's always hurling Socialistic bricks at me. I've tried to convince her of her errors with a pencil and a bit of paper. I worked out a sum in proportion, with a landowner and a man with a patent who had a certain amount of capital to start with. She said she didn't care a fig for my stupid landowner.

"I'm afflicted with a wife who has ideas of her own and means to live up to them. It's hard. I never counted on taking brains—of the bran-new sort—when I took Lucinda. I object to a clever woman. I work hard. I've got brains enough for both, and over. I ask for a pretty face, a fresh frock, good cooking—that's all. I can get the rest from the papers, or I can drop in at the club."

"Look here, old man," I said soothingly, "get her on facts. Never use pencil and paper to a woman—logic only irritates them. Make her live up to her doctrines—she'll be sick of them in a week."

Women soon tire; all froth and no ballast. (I'm forgetting that you're a woman, but you like the complete story.)

He went away after I had given him a few tips. At the end of the week he came back.

"Well?" I said optimistically, as he sat down and took out his pipe.

"I think she is a trifle better," he admitted, in a half-hearted way. "She won't part with the servant; says she really hasn't time and strength enough

for housework. But she admits that a servant is inconsistent with her theories, and she looked quite happy when she added that she really believed I was beginning to see things in the right light. I've told her plainly that I'll have no hypocrites in my home. Silver—her aunt left her some—flowers, Worcester tea-things, I wouldn't stand. She murmured something about it being a duty with every citizen to keep up the graces of life, but she yielded in the end. She was crying a bit as she wrapped the silver —beautiful Georgian stuff—away in chamois-leather bags.

"I said that a drawing room gave the very lie to her theories. She's turned the key of that room.

"The servant has given notice; of course she thinks the spoons are pawned. Lucinda is upset. But I said cheerily that it was so nice to be indifferent, to be supported by the consciousness of a worthy mission. I said that simplicity was the great thing. I suggested that we should sell the furniture—giving the proceeds to the Socialistic cause—and go to a boarding house. They board you in Gower Street for twenty-five shillings a

week—with a reduction, no doubt, on married couples. I said that she would then be quite free from housekeeping and would be able to throw more soul into her political work. You should have seen her face! I think she's beginning to be sorry that she converted me. Converts always go too far.

"But she's not cured," he concluded solemnly. "She went off this morning to Brentford, where some member of her party has his committee room."

"Perhaps we had better play our trump card," I said. "What time will she be back?"

"About nine."

"Very well. I'll look round with Smithers and Arnold. It's a job that Jimmy would enjoy, but he's so lantern-jawed she'd know him at once."

At nine Gully, Smithers, Arnold, and I were in Lucinda's drawing room, smoking very strong tobacco and drinking hot gin and water; it gave me heartburn for nearly a week. But it made a good steam and fume; effect was what we wanted. We all four looked—well, rough. A bristly chin and no collar alters a man immensely. As luck would have it, neither Smithers nor I had shaved that

morning; nor the morning before, in my case. Arnold wore a false beard.

Why do absconding criminals take the trouble to disguise themselves—decent, middle-class criminals who are accustomed to razors and clean linen? A bristly chin and a neck without a collar would do the whole business, without trouble or expense. If, added to that, the criminal gets his "portrait" in the paper, he's safe.

My feet were on the sofa. The gin bottle and a jug of beer stood on Lucinda's pet polished table. Arnold was gently scraping his boots on the copper scuttle, and Smithers had his head well into the white curtains. The rugs were kicked up; there were spent matches all over the floor. It was an education to see how by a few well-thought-out touches we had wrecked the room.

Lucinda was pretty punctual. She stood on the threshold for one second before she fled. I looked round. There was blank tragedy on her face. Gully got up, appearing a little guilty. He went out to her. Judging by the direction of their voices he found her in the lobby, with her face buried in

his overcoat. She was crying. We three in the untidy room, thick with smoke and stale with spirit, heard her say in a muffled way:

"This is too much. You've taken away the—s—silver—all the decencies of life. You talk to me of a cheap boarding house. I'll never consent to it; I'd rather die or go back to papa. And you've brought those wretches into my drawing room."

"But we agreed, darling, that it wasn't to be a drawing room any longer. We said that we'd devote it to the people. Your own idea was a laundresses' weekly tea, and——"

"You look disreputable. You look like—a—brigand. No collar—that tie. I never was so miserable. I never would have married you if——"

"My dearest, you wouldn't have me wound the susceptibilities of those worthy fellows——"

"And one with his hateful great feet on the embroidered cushion my cousin Ethel sent from India, and another——"

"Lucinda, you surprise me. I thought you'd be so pleased. I arranged it as a delicate attention—

a pleasant surprise party. Sons of toil, dear, all of them, and——"

"Dirty brutes! I hate the whole thing. I'm tired to death." We heard her stamp her feet viciously on the oil-cloth. "The election is all going to pieces. Let it! *I* don't care. Just look at my new skirt—all mud and torn to ribbons. You never saw such a filthy place, such a set of roughs! I couldn't even get a decent cup of tea. And—and—I went into the wrong committee room, and the man—the other man—laughed, the idiot! I wish I'd—— Oh, Tom! I never thought you could be so cruel, so unmanly. Do be yourself again. I can't think what has come over you. It has worried me dreadfully. Let us be comfortable again. Send those monsters away."

Gully said impressively:

"Will you go to the Wigans' ball? I've got my way to make in the world. Wigan's wife is—well, you know her. Decent old charwoman; got sense enough to hold her tongue. Wigan is sensitive on that point. If we snub his wife it may be bad for me."

"Will I go? What a question! Of course I will."

"And committee rooms and mass-meetings and particularly that Socialist cad——"

"Don't mention him. I'm sick, I tell you—sick, sick. He hardly spoke a civil word to me—after the way I've slaved. Go and send those men away, if you love me."

"You don't think a little friendly supper——"

"I won't hear of it."

We heard—well, we heard him kiss her—and then we heard her whisk away into the bedroom to bathe her eyes, and Gully came in with a wide grin to dismiss us. As we went through the passage we heard the vigorous splash of water in the basin.

Gully let us out. We went down the stone stairs, with stealthy handshakes and smothered chuckles, leaving him alone with Lucinda, and master once more.

BEYOND THE GRAY GATE.

Poor Nat Chaytor had this set once. It is very inconvenient—just two rooms and a nest of cupboards called a kitchen. You never saw such cupboards, such idiotic waste of space! Probably not. Every set is different. The old fellows who designed the place were freakish. It is small and inconvenient, but the best I can afford. I'm three quarters in arrears with the rent, as it is. Some day I shall have to shoot the moon and get the boys in the other sets to help me do it. We all hang together in adversity.

When Chaytor took it he was a clerk in the City at one hundred and eighty pounds a year. On one hundred and eighty pounds a year he married Minnie, who was the lady typewriting clerk in the same office. They lived here—just for a bit, as he always explained—until their ship came home. He was a most hopeful fellow. They pegged on pretty

comfortably for a time. Minnie smartened up the rooms—that plush bracket on the wall above your head was hers. She turned up her nose pretty considerably at other ladies in the Inn. She routed Chaytor's laundress. The poor old soul came and poured out her woes to me. She had everything her own way so long as Chaytor was a bachelor. I remember that he came home from the City one day in his lunch hour—which he usually stretched into two—and found her asleep on his bed. She had not even troubled to take off her battered black bonnet or the sacking apron whose narrow string kept her together at the waist. But Minnie, as she rather snappishly said, was not going to "put up with such ways. She would rather do the work herself." So Mrs. Percival got a week's notice.

"I've done for dozens of gentlemen in the Inn, as you knows, sir," she said pathetically to me; "and then to be sacked by a hussy like her. An' me the widow of a solicitor myself, and a lady by birth."

Things went on well enough with the Chaytors for a few months. We did not see much of Nat; Minnie had a freezing, fine-lady manner with old

bachelor friends, and liked her husband to go to bed when she did—punctually at eleven. Things went on well enough until he got discharged from his berth in the City. It was the usual story—business bad, reducing the staff, and so on. But I rather fancy that Nat's easy hours had something to do with it. He always turned up half an hour late in the morning, took two hours for his lunch, another hour for afternoon tea, and went off at six every night, very often leaving the members of the firm at their desks. He had that fierce, sick hatred of City life which so many fellows have—nearly all the fellows who are good for anything. The dozens that I have seen chuck the accursed City! Some of these go up and some go under. But whichever way it is, they live—or die—free men.

He lost his berth. He was rather relieved than otherwise. He had been expecting it for a long time. A City clerk's is a grim calling. He is never safe, and he knows that once out of a situation the chances are ten to one against his getting another. It is like losing your footing in a crowd—there is small chance of getting up again. Orion knew that;

it egged him on to murder the old woman in Great Ormond Street.

No doubt Nat had a hot time with Minnie when he told her the news. She was one of those small, sharp-featured, rasping-voiced girls, with an ineffaceable sneer on her lips. Her creed was getting on in the world. She had been hoping that Nat would have a rise—two hundred a year, so that they might have a house all to themselves in the suburbs, and a little maidservant with a cap and apron. She said that the Inn wasn't a fit place for a respectable young woman, and very likely she was right.

But Chaytor, as usual, put a good face on the affair. I think he was genuinely glad. The City fogs hurt his chest, he said; and was a man a slave or a schoolboy, that he should mount the same confounded office stool every morning, year in and year out!

"They only give us a fortnight's holiday," he added, "and then it is always wet. Find me the City clerk who has ever had a fine fortnight for his annual holiday!"

Minnie cried out savagely, "Stuff and nonsense!"

She asked him where he expected to find thirty-five pounds a year rent and a pound a week housekeeping, to say nothing of extras such as clothes.

"Easily enough," Chaytor cried airily. "I'm going in for journalism."

And then it began—the long, heart-breaking struggle—with a shrew at his elbow thrown in. He used to sit at the window and wait for the last post every evening. He watched the postman cross the square and fumble at his bag.

"That article is sure to be accepted," he would call into the room to Minnie. "Here is the check coming upstairs. We'll go down to your home for a little holiday."

But the check never came. It was always a long envelope addressed in his own handwriting and containing his "copy" and the diabolically polite regrets of the editor. Poor old Chaytor!

Minnie carefully cleaned and oiled her typewriter and put an advertisement in a literary paper for

copying work—quoting a penny a thousand less than the other advertisers.

The quick clinkety-clank of the typewriter tortured Chaytor; he hated machinery. He said mournfully that the world was rapidly becoming machine-made. Of course Minnie asked acidly, "where would he be if it were not for machines?"

Sometimes he got ten shillings, once a guinea, for an article, but it was the copying work that kept them. I remember the day when he got the guinea. He went out and spent two shillings on a plant in a pot for Minnie. You should have seen the look on her face when he presented it! I happened to be there. She went on clanking furiously, just spitting out through the din of her keys:

"The baker came while you were out. I had to shut the oak and keep as still as a mouse. We owe *him* ten shillings. I don't know where you think it is coming from."

I suppose she was right, but one couldn't help being sorry for Chaytor. He wasn't really fit for this work-a-day world. I often had a queer feeling that he did not mean to stop in it long.

One morning in early April he burst out laughing. He was sitting at a table near the window polishing up one of his articles, and Minnie was typing at another table in the middle of the room.

"What is the matter?" she asked sharply.

He looked at her across the machine in a dazed way.

"Oh, nothing!" he muttered, confused by her clear, business-like glance. "I was only wondering why I am here—that's all. It seemed odd."

"I wish you were not here," she returned practically. "Go and hunt round for a berth! There must be plenty. Why, if you began at £80 it would be better than nothing."

Then she got up, saying it was time to get something for dinner. She came in with her hat and cape on to ask what he would like. The shabbiness of that hat and cape struck his heart, although he had not quite got rid of the dazed, unreal feeling which had come over him so suddenly. He noticed too, that Minnie's cheeks, so pink once, had deepened to mottled purple, that her shallow eyes were hard and her cheek-bones sharp. He worried him-

self by wondering where her old self had gone. The girl he had courted under City gas lamps had left him and put a shrewish woman in her place. But she must have gone somewhere, that delicately tinted, coquettish girl. What became of cast-off selves?

"Well?" she said crisply, investigating the contents of her purse.

"Chops?"

"At thirteen pence a pound! No, thank you. A bit of beefsteak and a spring cabbage. I shan't be long. I shall just run down Red Lion Street."

She whisked off with her worn purse and her string bag. Chaytor began to dream of the country, which he knew very well, although he had never been more than ten miles from London since his childhood. But Minnie was a Somersetshire girl. She was always scattering careless word pictures. He knew just when you might find the first primroses, in sheltered spots, what cherry blossom was like, how they carted home hay. He knew the earliest date for the cuckoo, and how persistently the wryneck called through April and May; knew that

the first notes of the nightingales were unsteady, that ladies' smocks and king-cups only grew in damp spots.

He laughed. He felt that the country was his own rich inheritance. It really was ridiculous! A grim, rare, ripe joke that he—with such a kingdom of earth and sky—should be going through this farce. Why was he here? Why had he come? Why was he strangling himself slowly with thick London smoke? Why was he driving himself half mad to make both ends meet, to turn off articles suited to the popular taste—the debased popular taste which he scorned! It was queer. He laughed again.

Then he thought he would go out. Minnie would be annoyed when he came home and said that he had only been for a walk and not for a berth; but when you are playing at life, just masquerading, a woman's anger does not matter very much. He went across the square. I saw him go. It was such a spring-like morning—in the Inn—that I almost called out of the window to say that I would come too. Instead of that, I watched him from be-

[illegible] the curtain and noticed for the first time how [illegible] it was. How muddied its skirtings were.

He went across to the Hudson Town Hall, where the trams start. He went up one to Stamford Hill and got down and went shaving along a row of new houses. They were villas of the sort that Minnie had been ambitious for when there was some chance of the screw being raised to two hundred pounds. They were semi-detached, between each pair was a narrow passage, convenient for the carting of coal and refuse. He stopped at one of these shoots; the passage was barred by a gate, an unpainted gate of grey oak.

He pushed it open, shut it softly, gave a last look back, and then went down the narrow entry. New walls of cheap brick rose on each side; the April wind hunted softly after him. At the end of the passage was another gate, which he went through. Beyond it was open common.

There had been rain. He saw stretches of dim brown and bleached yellow, broken here and there by the bright mustard tint of fully blown broom and patched with little pools on which the sun shone,

turning them into irregular plates of turquoise. There was a tethered goat with a little kid by her side. Haughty geese, with their newly hatched families behind them, strutted proudly. There were ever so many young things; humpy, clumsy calves, ducklings trying to swim in the pools with all the dignity and address of their elders; a colt, set on long, stick-like, squarely placed legs—like a toy wooden horse—and with a funny tail like a hearth brush. Chaytor laughed heartily with recollection of this colt when he was telling us his experiences.

The heather sprang up after his feet had crushed it. Everything was whole and sweet. He sniffed at a delicious, intangible smell. He sat down, the ground yielded to his body like a pillow. He gave his aching lungs, clogged with so many years of smoke and fog, their fill. There was no house in sight, no, not one. No chimney speared the sky. The sky! He looked up, and the blue and yellow blinded him. He looked down and saw only wide clean common, patched by broom and gorse, spread with withered heather. A bird flew up singing, as if its throat would burst. Across the common

came a jerky, regular call. Something tight came up in his neck and his eyes grew hot and dry. He had heard the lark. He had heard the cuckoo. He had ceased to masquerade, to play the fool. He had come to his own. He jumped up with a tremendous feeling of strength and exhilaration and went on. He swung his shoulders with a grand free swing. He looked about him, intently, critically, as a man looks at his inheritance.

The common seemed to be garnering itself and the face of the country was changing. He was approaching a pastoral district. He crossed a bridge; on one side was an iron railing, on the other a low coping of stone. He climbed over a stile. It had easy steps and a broad top—a good stile to linger on. It led into a little copse; merely a copse fringed with hazel, with a thick carpet of rotting leaves, with primroses and oxlips holding up their starry heads, with bluebells making a powdery haze.

There were lovers in the copse. They stared at him furtively, then scuttled into the shadow like timid birds. But he saw both the man and the girl grin sheepishly.

Beyond the copse was luscious, elastic pasture land. He went lightly along, noticing everything with microscopic fidelity. Women in the distance were bent double as they rooted out the flaming charlock from a field of barley.

Presently he saw an empty cottage, with broken windows and dropping roof of thatch. He wandered round it, looking in at rooms which were low-pitched and floored with flagstones, and which had yawning hearths for a wood fire. He stood in the orchard, where a red cow who had come in through a gap in the hedge was munching rank grass. The apple trees, with lichened, twisted trunks, were beginning to bloom. He walked round each tree slowly, as if he were some ancient priest intent on sacred rites. Then he wondered idly if there were any Quarranden apples. Minnie's mother, the Somersetshire wife, had sent her daughter up a basket of those once. They were like Minnie's own cheeks, and the red tinge went faintly through. When you took a big, rough bite, you saw pink bubbles of juice. It was like biting human flesh. He never forgot that basket of apples. Their ar-

rival set a white stone in his life. They brought him into actual touch with his kingdom.

After a while he came out on a dusty road. Two boys, tow-headed and in picturesque rags, were looking after two lean cows who grazed by the waste. These children grinned at him broadly, as the lovers in the copse had done—though, like the lovers, they made no sound. It was a very silent world, except for the sing and cry of birds and animals. The boys grinned, evidently finding him much more diverting than the scarecrow three fields off, which was hanging its limp head and waving its fantastic arms. Chaytor felt uncomfortable; he was always a sensitive chap.

"They are laughing at my top hat and black coat," he said to himself. "One ought to have a tweed suit for the country. That article on 'Why Wear a White Shirt?' is certainly in the popular style and will be taken. I'll turn off two or three more in the same vein and then get some tweeds. Minnie and I can come here often. It won't cost much. We can always run to the tram fare."

The country echoed with weak bleats; it was the

month when young lambs are dropped. He went on. The sky kept changing. Sometimes it was reminiscent of towns. He dreaded to see some foul gust of smoke break over the misty hills which belted him. Then it was dappled, then clear blue. It sloped to the horizon in streaks, as if swept by a broad-lipped brush. The earth changed too; it was green, purple, spice-colored, or hot red. Clumps of elms rose here and there, usually marking a homestead. Their black branches waved like the straggling feathers in Minnie's Sunday hat. There was no sound—but the sound of the cuckoo and of sheep. He seemed to actually hear the silence. He was away from machines at last; not even the shriek of a railway engine disturbed him. He was away from the clack of praiseworthy Minnie's typewriter. He let it flood his ears—this stillness. These were the restful, silent moments he had often longed for. Everything was stationary. There was no fierce struggle to get on, to grab more than your neighbor.

He drank in all the wonder of the hedgerows; the tight, shy fronds of the male fern—all the marvelous secrecy of the curved bank. He saw primroses, the

dapple of pale lilac where milkmaid bloomed. Dandelions, like dropped guineas, rose from the grass.

He came to another house, and stared at the long wasteful slope of the red roof, at narrow windows lurking under heavy eaves, at the tracery of oak beams across greenish-white plaster walls. A tremendous pear tree just in bloom shaded the house door. A patch of kitchen garden had been turned up roughly in autumn; there were black heaps of manure, the size and shape of haycocks, on the ridged earth. Clothes hung on a line—dim colors, patched garments of outlandish shape. The bloom of the pear tree was falling; it was gray on the stone path.

A young woman came out to the gate and stared at him curiously. He asked her for a drink of water. She led the way into the dairy, never saying a word. He thought the silence of country people very strange. He had become accustomed to the restless loquacity of the eager Cockney.

She was a fresh-faced young woman and seemed fragrant, just as everything else was. A robust woman! Her arms beneath her rolled-up sleeves

were quite brawny—rosy, round arms, dented at the elbows and a deeper red. He watched her dip the milk. The dairy was cool; he thought of a sweet, intensely still grave. There were shallow bowls full of cream. There was a slab of slate on which was butter in firm pounds, all marked with the same mark. She gave him the milk and shook her head when he offered to pay. Their hands touched round the mug, which was striped blue and white. Hers was strong and dry and very cold.

When he went away he looked back once. She was at the gate, watching him with a slow, speculative glance in which he fancied he detected a touch of fear. He took away a vivid impression of her. She was a ruddy-faced young woman in a lilac cotton gown. It was short-waisted, and her linen apron was tied very high, almost under her arms. She seemed oddly shaped—a creature with a minimum of body; all curly head, round, big bust, and long limbs.

. . . . .

He sidled out at the oak gate stealthily. He was so afraid that he would be seen, that someone else

would find that walk; someone tainted with the horrible modern idea of Progress; someone who would build and bring machinery. He took the first tram home. The people who also rode on it had never seemed more cadaverous, more fusty. They exhaled an odor of wardrobe shops.

I met him in the square almost at his own doorway. The deep hollows in his face were filled with red. His long hands were quivering with excitement.

"Come up to my rooms," he said hastily. "I've something to tell you—I've had a most wonderful experience."

We went up. He opened the door with his key. Minnie was cooking the dinner, her bit of beefsteak fizzled and sputtered savagely in the pan. Her pretty little pinched face was like a thundercloud.

"Never mind the dinner," Chaytor said, going up to the fire and kissing her effusively. "My darling! I've had such a find. We might go and live there; rent would be next to nothing. My articles would keep the pot boiling. I should insist on your selling your typewriter—no cursed machinery there!

I should have to be careful going in and out of the gray gate—that is all. If anyone else spotted it we should be ruined."

He sat down in the first chair, panting a little. Minnie said impatiently:

"What on earth does he mean?"

She dished up her steak and pressed me none too graciously to have some with them. So we three sat round the little table, and Chaytor told us all he had seen. He told it so vividly—I have repeated it to you almost word for word—that he really flung a glamour over this mean little London room. He sat just there, with his back to the cupboard where they kept their bundles of wood—where I still keep mine. Poor Chaytor! The smell of the country seemed to blow over us all. Even Minnie grew faintly excited.

"But it is impossible," she said. "Why, I know Stamford Hill; an aunt of mine lived there once. She had a house standing in its own grounds." She glanced at me to see if this fact impressed me. "But there is no country there. I'm certain of it. I used to spend my Sundays with Aunt Jane. The

last old house was pulled down years ago. Six streets of villas stand on the site. I've seen them."

But Chaytor babbled on of his lilac woman.

"It's all nonsense," Minnie said more clinchingly. "You dreamt it—I believe you're asleep more than half your time. And even if you weren't asleep, everyone knows that consumptives have queer fancies. It's no good wriggling on your chair like that when you know very well that the doctor told you ever so long ago that you had only one lung."

"It was real," he insisted, flinching a little at her candor. "So real that I seemed to have been there before."

"I know," I said soothingly. "We all have that feeling sometimes. Bloater paste serves me like that; makes me think of a red-haired fellow in a punt. These things are odd. Murphy used to feel the same over ripe plums—only *his* was an empty barn and a thunderstorm."

I've always tried hard to be practical, you know. I'm convinced that money is the secret of all happiness—though I've never had the peculiar quality that

makes it. For once I thought that I'd be business-like.

"If you should be right," I said to Chaytor, "there is a fortune in it. I think I know a man who would finance us. By what you say the land is ripe for development; we could cut it up into estates —plant shrubs and rows of horse chestnuts—you know the sort of thing. We'd call it the Marlowe estate, after the Inn."

Chaytor flinched; then he said with a droll smile:

"If I thought you meant that I would cut my throat rather than take you there. But you never were a money-grubber, old fellow. Come and see for yourself. Everything will be as I have told you —the bridge, the empty house, the little wood. And the woman at the dairy—we'll get her to give us some milk."

Minnie was staring at him with round, cold eyes. Her elbows were on the table.

He touched her hand.

"Come on," he said tenderly.

She got up, looked at her machine, hesitated, and then said, "It's a fine afternoon and a blow will do

me good. I've finished that MS. We may as well."

She put on her best blouse and a pair of new gloves. It was a beautiful afternoon, and we were all gay as we trundled along on the roof of the tram.

Chaytor led us to the row of semi-detached villas. Minnie eyed them admiringly.

"That is the sort of house I should like," she said with a sigh. "There is every convenience."

Chaytor was going along very slowly, looking intently at the mouth of every passage. He went to the very end of the row. We followed, feeling half excited and half foolish. I said with sudden suspicion to Minnie:

"It isn't the first of April, is it?"

She returned with dangerous brevity:

"No. The sixth."

She was eying Chaytor with a look that boded a row. He suddenly wheeled round sharply; even she was startled, I think, by the change in his face—it was gray, like the gate of which he talked.

"It isn't here," he said in a quavering voice. "It's gone—the gray gate. Gone!"

He looked at us with panic-stricken eyes. Then he started eagerly back, peering into every passage. When he reached the last he turned again.

"It's gone," he repeated. "Oh, my God! it's gone. I've lost it!"

He let his head drop, and leaned helplessly against the railings of the next house. Minnie glanced at me eloquently, raising her nose and brows and shoulders.

"Let's get him home," she said in an agony for appearances. "There is a tram at the corner. Hurry up. Don't be such a fool, Nat. I never was so ashamed in my life. There was nothing—I never expected there would be. Just see how that woman across the way is staring. Well she may! I knew there would not be anything. How could there be? You can see the back-garden palings and the dust hole at the end of every one."

We had reached the tram. She bundled Chaytor up the steps and followed him, not seeming to care whether I came or not.

He was never the same afterward. He never wrote an article. He talked of nothing but the gray

gate. He used to beg Minnie piteously for his tram fare. Sometimes she gave the coppers just to be rid of him.

"He's going 'dotty,'" she said fiercely to me, beating the inanimate type with her quick fingers.

Sometimes he would wake up in the morning and sing as he dressed—putting on his clothes with feverish, jerking hands, she used to come and tell me. He said he had made a mistake in the row—those cursed villas were so much alike. Would she come too? He was sure of finding it this time. He wouldn't bother her for any more tram fares. He was very sorry.

When he walked he used to put out his hand like a blind man and grope with his long fingers—as if he hoped to feel something that he was not permitted to see. He was feeling for wood—for the gray gate. I met him once and took his arm and carried him off to have a drink.

He said to me quite seriously, as we stood at the bar:

"These bricks are killing me. Why the devil

can't people keep still? It is nothing but pulling down houses and putting up taller ones all over Bloomsbury. I tell you frankly, old fellow, I can't breathe. My throat burns—as if they were stuffing their lime down it. Every scaffold pole knocks at my heart. It's killing me. You haven't any coppers about you, I suppose? The tram fare isn't much. I could get down to Stamford Hill and back again before dusk."

One night I saw Minnie run bareheaded across the square toward my door. I had the second floor at No. 7 in those days. She looked a little wild and frightened, but she was self-possessed enough to throw a look of stone at Sophia Dominy, who was going toward Kinsman's set.

Presently I heard her on my stairs and went out.

'Come over to Nat," she panted. "I think he is dying. The doctor told me that bit of lung he had would last for years, but it isn't going to."

He was lying in the bed. It stood under the window then. Near to his hand was a pile of those hateful long envelopes. The editorial regrets that

had helped to break his heart peeped out from the open ends.

"I've been looking over some of these things," he panted, touching the articles and smiling at me in the old droll, half-scornful way. "Some of them were bad and vulgar enough—Heaven knows. Yet they did not get accepted. 'Does Cold Muton Cause Gumboil?'—I thought that would be sure to go. 'The Woman with the White Shoe Strings' —it is a most sensational detective story—and yet, one after the other, they threw my stuff back at me. I've written the title pages afresh ever so many times, so that the MS. should not look as if it had been hawked about."

It was a very hot July night, the windows were open top and bottom. Jimmy, across the way, was singing the latest song from the "halls" in his feeble voice.

Poor Nat was quiet for a little. Then he turned his head suddenly and looked at Minnie. I've seen him look like that at her when they were courting. No doubt she remembered, for she bent down and softly shook up his pillows.

"It's no good your going for the doctor," she whispered huskily back in answer to my question. "He was here this morning. He told me he could do nothing. I can't afford to throw away money for nothing, can I?"

There were tears in her eyes, like shining splinters of glass. We heard footsteps on the pavement below, and men's voices came up to the open window. The fellows had come home from the City. Nat did not seem to hear; he was devouring Minnie's face line by line, looking at her in a dazed, silly way.

"It is good of you to come," he said at last, very simply and gratefully. "How did you find it? So few people—country people, you know—have heard of the Inn. It must seem a noisy, dirty place to you—there are blacks all down your nice white apron. But we won't stay. You will show me the way back. It was very curious about that gate."

. . . . .

Minnie looked very well in widows' weeds—those fair, neat little women generally do. I always tried very hard to like Minnie. I admired her practical

spirit. Practicality means money, and money means ease. She came knocking at my door three days after the funeral, and said beseechingly:

"Come down with me on the tram to Stamford Hill."

We went. The trams were crowded, it was Saturday afternoon. We walked slowly along the row of villas in the blazing sun—the row where Nat had sworn he found the gray gate.

"Poor old chap," I said. "He wasn't fit for this world. But what a gold mine there would have been in it!"

"It was at this house he seemed to stop most," she said. "I remember the India-rubber plant in the front window."

We stopped. There was an old, palsied sort of fellow tidying up the rockery. I spoke to him—don't know why.

"I suppose you remember this neighborhood before it was built on?"

"When it was a one-eyed country place," elaborated Minnie.

He straightened his body on his spade, and looked

at us, cunningly, like old people often do. An eager light came into his bleared eyes. It seemed to me the light of youth breaking uncannily through the crust of seventy years. He remembered—sure he did. He became suddenly voluble—talking more to himself than to us.

"It's a good many year since this 'ere part was open country. Ah! there was a gate on the common —hereabouts, as near as I can mind. A bit on was a bridge, stone one side and iron t'other. A man had to keep a sharp lookout if he come home full o' liquor nights. The rail runs there now—they built a new 'un. There was a copse—Shannonses copse, I think they called it, but my memory aint what it was. You went over a stile. That was a rare place for coortin'"—he grinned, showing a toothless cavern, and he spluttered with merry memories as he rocked on the spade.

"There was a cottage near by—my father had it. I jest call to mind *his* father plantin' the orchard—a very old man as couldn't expect to see the fruit. A fine orchard it wur—Blenum orringe trees and Tom Spuds and all sorts. Dickson's tannery stands

there now. If you went on, through the fields and across the road, you come to Hillyar's farm—that's Stern & Carson's brewery. Hillyar's pears was wonderful for keepin'. I mind Loo Hillyar—sich arms;" he leered at Minnie, whose face was chalky under her black bonnet. "You don't see young women like that these times. Sich a hand at butter-making. It must be fifty—forty year ago or more since me an' her drove geese over the common. It couldn't ha' been so fur from where we stands, neither. Here, as you may say, or thereabouts—but the face of the earth do change so."

He spat on his hands and bent his back to the weary task of tidying the melancholy mound of clinkers and starved ferns. I gave him sixpence and I gave Minnie my arm. She clutched it wildly. There was a shadow on her pretty, common face—the shadow of the unexplainable.

What did it mean? I don't pretend to say. Odd, wasn't it? But then the world is odd. We just skim it and fancy we have proved all.

Minnie? She went back to a City office as typist, and she married the principal in less than a year.

She was always the sort of girl to do well for herself—her marriage with Chaytor was an aberration. She lives in a very swagger house at East Croydon, wears rather loud dresses, and talks persistently of "my cook."

THE SET AT SEVEN.

SHALL I tell you about the set at 7? It is quite a proper story. You might call it dramatic. If poor Nat Chaytor were alive he would turn it into one of his thrilling tales for the penny papers—and get it rejected because it wasn't probable. In popular tales you must be probable, and you must be proper. You may cut as many throats and embezzle as much money as you please—always remembering to do it in a thoroughly respectable manner.

Orchard lived at 7—the left-hand set on the third floor. His was the most extraordinary affair. Poor Jimmy died there. Orion had the set—has it still, so they say. He comes back. We have a real, if rather foolish, ghost in the Inn.

The man who took that set after the Great Ormond Street murder—his name slips me, but he went down in the *Drummond Castle*—had never

seen Orion. I forget his name, but we'll call him Drummond.

Pearson went to see him one night. He happened to be just going out; he said he wouldn't be more than half an hour, and he made Pearson comfortable with some whisky and the current *Fortnightly*. When he came back Pearson said, with annoyance, looking a little disgusted and jerking his head toward the bedroom door:

"Didn't know you were so intimate with Orion."

"Orion! Never heard the name. Yet—let me see. He had these rooms. I took them over with the furniture."

"Never heard the name! Why, he's in your bedroom at this moment. Walked about very much as if he were at home. Came strolling in with his old confounded jaunty air. I haven't seen him for nearly three years, but he hasn't altered a bit. You must have left the outer door ajar, or else he's kept a key. That would be just one of Orion's mean dodges. He walked about with his hands in his trousers' pockets, just as usual. I didn't speak; we had a row once. There was a bill; he wouldn't pay

his share. And one night when I was a bit on I broke the glass of the sideboard—threw a tumbler at it. He couldn't stand that.

"Yet, why didn't I speak? What made me keep so quiet? Why didn't I ask him what the devil he meant by prying about another man's rooms?

"He went and tinkered with the ornaments, scowled at the dust, picked up a match from the carpet—I could have sworn he picked it up, but it's there still, just near your foot—and then went into the bedroom. He's in there still. Confound it!" starting to his feet; "what was I doing to let him go in like that?"

Drummond was looking very queer.

"Orion," he said quietly, "has been dead six months. He murdered his aunt and then jumped out of the window to evade the hangman. If you hadn't been abroad you would have heard of it. We'll have a look round the bedroom, if you like."

Of course he wasn't there. That is our ghost story. Several fellows have seen him since—so they say.

Dick Simpson came after Drummond. He said

he saw Orion lots of times, and didn't take the least notice. Rather resented sharing his rooms with another man who didn't pay a penny rent, and who hadn't the tact to make himself scarce when anybody dropped in—but that was all. Poor Dick wasn't nervous or imaginative. Orion used to come in, shake his head at the dust, at torn leather paper on the walls and mangy ball fringe at the mantelshelf, then go quietly through into the bedroom. Dick told me the other day that he had just smashed the last of the rose-colored gas globes. He had the bits in a bag and was going to match it in the City. If he didn't, Orion would be bound to look in tonight; he was beginning to be a bit of a bore.

Simpson was an insurance clerk, most commonplace, most steady. He was always having his top hat ironed, and recommending one to buy a pair of trouser stretchers. He went to the theater every Saturday night, and stopped in bed late on Sunday. He was quite content and prosperous on his sixty-five shillings a week, yet, because he had the set at 7 on the third floor, we all waited without saying anything, to him or to each other, for something

extraordinary to happen. In his case we thought it might be just vulgar embezzlement—but you can never be sure, it is always the most unlikely thing that happens to the tenant of that third-floor set. When once it gets hold of a man it never lets him go. It never gives him up. More often than not it hands him over to the undertaker. And you know what happened to Dick.

There was a story of Bob and Barbara Piety. You'll like that. If I were writing the story, instead of just gossiping it to you in the dusk, I should call it "The Play's the Thing." It is Hamlet—in an Inn of Court.

. . . . . .

Bob Piety lived in the Inn as a bachelor. He married a nice girl—Miss Martin—and took a villa at Norwood. A few months before he married he lent Murphy twenty pounds. We all warned him; Murphy never paid, and made a boast of never paying, but these Irishmen are wheedling, and Bob was pretty flush just then. On this unlucky twenty pounds the whole story hangs.

Barbara had babies very quickly; servants' wages

rose each time she changed—and she was always changing. The beer barrel constantly gave out, and it was generally quarter day. Bob had a good post, as the City goes. But four hundred a year, though ample in the Inn, is only a pittance at Norwood, with an extravagant, prolific wife, a seventy-pound villa, and two maids, with a boy to clean the knives.

One morning, as Barbara was flicking at Bob's coat with the clothes brush before he went to the City, she asked him timidly for a new gown.

"It won't cost five pounds," she said, pulling his coat down at the back. "You don't like me to look shabby, dear, do you? And, Bob, while I think of it, just leave me Maria's wages. I've had to give her a rise. You can't get a really decent cook general for less than twenty pounds a year. And we want some new linoleum for the nursery—I'd better order it to——"

"I can't really run to it all, Barbara"—he never called her Barbara except in a crisis, and when they were first married it usually made her cry. "There are the taxes, and I ought to have a new overcoat.

And there is Pillew's bill for the whooping cough. The kids must do without linoleum. Wear anything at the party—or we'll stop at home. I'm hanged if I know where all the things are coming from. Twenty pounds for one girl—it's preposterous."

"Twenty pounds! Why, you lent some horrid bachelor that. It would pay Maria for a year. Go and get it out of him."

"It is a bad debt."

"You must make him pay. Now do, Bob, dear. It breaks my heart to see you worried."

"I will make him," Bob said after a minute's pause, and added savagely, his nerves racked by wife, babies, and bills, "I'll get it out of him by fair means or foul."

Barbara cried out, before she kissed him and gave the final pull to his coat at the back:

"How can you talk in that dreadful way? One would think you meant to murder the man."

At that moment Maria came out of the dining room with the breakfast tray.

Well, in the evening Bob went to the Inn and

found Murphy at home. He asked him bluntly to pay back the twenty pounds, and Murphy said airily that it was ridiculous—a joke on Bob's part—he hadn't twenty pence in the world. This led to words. In the thick of the row there was a knock at Murphy's door and he left the room to open it. Piety heard the murmur of voices—Murphy's and another which he did not recognize. Then he heard a movement like a sharp scuffle of feet on the boards, heard a piercing cry and a heavy fall, and the quick, frightened patter of feet on the stairs. That was all. When he rushed into the little passage both of the outer doors were open, and Murphy was lying stone-dead just inside the "set." There was the handle of a queer-looking knife sticking up from his waistcoat, and his blood had poured out in a great dark pool in which the Syrian curtains that draped the archway of the passage were dabbled.

Bob tried to raise the body. But the Irishman had been a burly fellow, and he only succeeded in spattering himself with blood. We all heard that fearful scream of poor Murphy's; it even pierced the oak, for Kinsman, who had been shut away in his

rooms with Sophia Dominy, came rushing upstairs, followed by the girl. I had the set opposite Murphy's on the second floor, so I was first on the spot.

Sophia gave a yell when she saw the dead man. Kinsman bade her pull herself together, and in a minute or so she flew away down the stairs, saying she would find a policeman. By this time the whole square was roused. There were lights at most of the windows, sashes were flung up, men ran out in their slippers and with their pipes still stuck in the corner of their mouths, asking what was up. Kinsman and I ran down too. Piety didn't move. He might have got away easily, but he stood dazed, staring at the heavy body of the dead Irishman; stood and stared sluggishly, with the splashed blood drying on his face and hands, just where it had spurted, and dropping heavily from his limp red cuff, the corner of which was soaked. Of course, everybody said that he had murdered Murphy in a fit of temper, because he couldn't get his twenty pounds back. I knew they had been rowing, heard their angry voices across the passage when I went to my door to

admit a visitor. It looked bad for Bob. Yet I didn't believe that he had done it. All the other fellows pooh-poohed his lame explanation, and some said that Murphy, who was a thorough bad lot, was well out of the way, and others, who had known Mrs. Bob as Miss Martin, were full of sympathy for the poor little woman.

It was a wet night. Warm rain fell straight from the sky to the square. The light of each lamp above the hooded doors was reflected on the pavements. The stair leading to the second floor at 7 was crowded—with men in slippers and girls without any hats. One of the girls went into hysterics. Another one propped her up against the wall and undid her collar and called out shrilly for cold water and smelling salts. And then, after what seemed an interminable time, Sophia brought a policeman —he had been off the beat, of course—and Bob was arrested.

I went with him to the station, and after that I went down to Norwood and broke the news to Barbara.

I never believe in those women who, when trouble

comes, sit at home and weep and wait and pray. They are fools, or callous. Your true woman must be doing something. Barbara never shed a single tear. She didn't wring her hands or scream or faint. She only kept saying, with pitiful monotony, that it was her wicked vanity and extravagance which had got Bob in a mess, and that she meant to get him out of it.

She seemed to rise all at once out of villadom—that smug, narrow life which ruins so many people. Villadom! It promulgates the hateful, stultifying creed of "paying your way." Barbara told me once that a lady at Norwood refused to visit another lady because she hadn't paid her butcher's bill. She threw off her shackles—the shackles of that spick-and-span house, with the stiff white curtains at the windows, the demure maidservants, and the noisy overflow of babies. She sent for Mrs. Martin to keep house, then packed a little black box, kissed her children with the air of a Spartan, and came away to the Inn with me.

With me! Why not? She had my set. I went and turned in with Hawkins. He had a little den

leading out of his bedroom, which he used as a carpenter's shop, and his laundress as a kitchen! It was very good of me to do that for a comparative stranger! But she wasn't. You see—hadn't I mentioned it?—Barbara was an old flame of mine. It was a close running between me and Bob at one time. But I backed out. He had four hundred pounds a year and I hadn't a penny—that could be called certain. Sometimes I make a haul and sometimes I starve. That would have killed Barbara. She had always been educated to the necessity of a certain income.

She came and settled in my rooms, so as to be near Bob. At Norwood she might as well have been in Alaska—these suburbs are so beautifully isolated. And then, as she confessed to me, she hoped to pick up evidence. Of course she believed in her husband's innocence. She went farther than that; she was convinced that the murder was committed by someone in the Inn—in the house—at 7.

I gave her a list of all the tenants. I tried to show her how impossible it was. On the ground floor was Kinsman, who had been shut up with

Sophia. The set opposite was empty. The sets on the first floor were rented as offices, and both principals and clerks had been gone for hours at the time Murphy was stabbed. On the second floor, Murphy had one set and I the other. On the third floor, one set was empty and the other—the fatal set, although she knew nothing about that—belonged to Stapley.

Stapley was a quiet young fellow. He was engaged to his cousin, spent his Sundays with his widowed mother at Dulwich, and was reading hard for a Civil Service appointment. As I pointed out to Barbara, Murphy was murdered on Saturday night, and Stapley always left for Dulwich on Saturday afternoon. I saw him come back myself at the usual time on Monday morning. But she wouldn't be convinced. She was certain that the murderer was in the Inn, in the very house.

The Inn bore with her. Laundresses stared after her sympathetically as she went up and down the old stairs, and called her to each other, "Pore young thing." The fellows, many of whom had met her as Miss Martin, didn't know how to show their

sympathy. They brought her flowers and new-laid eggs—anything. One brought a stray white kitten that he'd found in a doorway. Arnold offered a pure-bred bull pup, and was hurt when she refused it. Arnold was a great fancier. His book of devotion was a bulky volume, "Druid on Dogs."

The girls who spend a social evening or a Sunday at the Inn occasionally talked of her with honest tears. They are good, kind, hard-working souls, these gay little shop girls, as a rule. And I think they felt it all the more because they could not do anything for her; dare not even say how sorry they were. Between them and her was the unbreakable barrier which stands breast-high between the women who are—well, particular—and the women who are not.

She brought a faint air of repression and tragedy into the Inn, but no one dreamed of resenting it. The careless, rather wild life we all lead seemed suddenly hollow, feeble—wicked almost. Many a host said to a noisy friend:

"Don't make so much row, old man. You'll frighten Mrs. Piety."

She used to creep about at all hours; used to listen on the stairs, peep into sets if a door happened to be open, watch men and girls in and out with the air of a hungry cat. But everybody understood and everybody sympathized. The little light-haired woman in black, with the sad, inquisitive glances, became our Deity.

I went with her to every curio shop and marine store in Bloomsbury. There are many. Some of the people who keep them are regular characters in their way. We were trying to find out the history of the dagger—that queer-handled weapon which had stuck out from dead Murphy's waistcoat. The police had it. They were making every inquiry of course, but Barbara thought she could do better than they. As I said, a true woman must do something —even if it is something foolish. The little stuffy, foul courts of Holborn grew to know her and to pity her. All the other women pointed after her furtively and said, as the laundresses said, "Pore young thing."

You don't want me to go into the detective side of the affair. You can well imagine the array of evi-

dence against Bob; you can see the damning importance of his row with Murphy, of the soaked red corner of his cuffs, and the red-ocher splashes on his face and hands.

Barbara heard him committed for trial. She didn't cry out or even shudder. But her eyes grew more wide and somber than before.

That night I took her to the theater. Several fellows came to me quite seriously and said:

"Do something to distract her. The poor woman's going out of her mind."

Hemming—he had been a friend of Jimmy's, and was on a dramatic paper—added:

"Take her to a music hall, make her dead-drunk—anything for a distraction. The theater for a compromise. I can pass you into the Adelphi. There is a splendid melodrama on there. Something exciting."

I had expected opposition, but, queerly enough, she jumped at the idea. She dressed herself very smartly; I think her face was rouged. She kept laughing as we jolted to the Strand in a cab.

In the second act there was a row between two

men, and one stabbed the other to the heart. It was most unlucky. Barbara was staring up at the dress circle. She turned to me suddenly, her cheeks and eyes blazing. She got up and slipped on her cloak, pulling the hood well over her head before she was out of doors. When I rose too she made a quick, excited gesture, and whispered:

"Don't follow. Whatever you do, don't follow."

I let her go out quietly alone. When I happened to look up at the dress circle I saw a vacant seat.

When one man on the stage stabbed the other, Barbara naturally turned her head away. She happened to look up at the dress circle, and her eyes fixed on a family party in the front row. It was Stapley, the girl he was engaged to, and her mother.

Barbara was struck by the look on his face. He seemed as much moved by that murder on the stage as she was. He looked a guilty man, a terrified man. His face was the face of a corpse; his eyes were the eyes of a corpse—some corpse whose last impression had been one of fearful horror.

Presently he rose, whispered a word or two to

his companions, and went away. At the same moment Barbara slipped up from her seat in the stalls.

She followed him out of the theater, along the brilliant whirl of the Strand, through dirty little streets to Holborn, across the road, under the gateway, and into the Inn. The square was quiet. The trees waved troublously. There were peep-holes of bright light at men's windows, and once she heard a loud peal of laughter.

Stapley turned in at No. 7.

The policeman happened to be taking shelter in the doorway of No. 5. It was a wet night. She stepped back and whispered to him before she crept with a stealthy, springy step up the stairs. Stapley went on, past my rooms, past Murphy's, to the top floor. He put in his key and opened the door of his set—the fatal set, which had been responsible for so much; the set which had egged on Orion to murder, which had saddled poor Orchard with such a horrid companion—I'll tell you that some other day—which had seen Jimmy die. He opened the door. There was a bracket lamp on the wall immediately

opposite. It was burning feebly, and there was a dark circle on the wall paper behind it, where the oil had sweated. Below the lamp was a little glass which Orion had gilded with a sixpenny bottle of dye. Barbara was close behind Stapley—so close that she could see her own face in the little glass slightly behind his.

He stepped in. She leaned over the banisters and swiftly beckoned. She heard the roar of the streets through the open window on the staircase, and she heard the heavy tread of the policeman's boots on the wood. Then she glided after Stapley. Before he turned to shut the door she was in the passage alone with him at the top of the big, quiet house, with the policeman coming steadily up the stairs. Her eyes, when later on she told me the scene, were the glowing, deadly eyes of a wild beast. I suppose she must have looked at Stapley in the same way—accusingly, fiercely, without a shimmer of mercy. No doubt she thought of Bob waiting for his trial, of the quiet, narrow life at Norwood which had satisfied her, and which she was in danger of losing. She said crisply:

"A policeman is coming up to arrest you for the murder of Denis Murphy."

When she saw Stapley's face she no longer had the least doubt of his guilt.

The policeman came up, puffing a little, to the third flight, and Stapley, taken utterly by surprise, not knowing how much had been found out, never said a single word in defense, never resisted when he was arrested. There wasn't a tittle of evidence against him. It was a woman's instinct, only a woman's instinct, that—hanged him? No; the set spares its victims that. It gave Orion a hint to fling himself out of the window. Only a woman's instinct. If I had not taken her to that melodrama, Bob Piety would have swung.

"The Play's the Thing." Now, wouldn't that be a splendid title? If only poor Nat had been alive!

Stapley was tried. He made a full confession. The jury, finding his story much too fantastic, brought him in mad, and, so far as I know, he is alive, at Broadmoor at this moment.

It came out in evidence, and on his own showing,

that he had been going queer for some time before he stabbed Murphy. He had been reading very hard, and then, of course, those rooms got on his nerves. He exaggerated trifles. For instance, he fixed a certain hour for his laundress to turn up in the morning. He used to get up and wait for her with his watch in his hand, dreading that she would be a minute late. That morning arrival of hers became the one moment of his day. He could think of very little else. Would she come in time to-morrow? Was it worth his while to pay her if she wouldn't be punctual, if she wasted daily five minutes? Five minutes! Ten sometimes. How much did that mount up to in a month? The woman was deliberately robbing him. He would not stand it. One must draw the line somewhere. He used to beseech her, bully her, raise her money, threaten to sack her. He bribed her with old hats and trousers for her husband. If she would only turn up to time, so that the one hour of the day—that hour of nine—could take its place with the others, sink into comparative insignificance like the rest!

He used to ask other fellows very earnestly—we all remembered it afterward:

"What would you do if your laundress was always five minutes late in the morning? I want practical advice. I don't want to be hard on the woman; but, then, no one likes to be imposed upon."

Sometimes he would oversleep and she would slip in quietly with her key and wake him by planking his boots down outside his bedroom door. On those days he was more wretched than ever, because he had no means of judging how late she had been.

He used to decide beforehand what dress the pretty cousin would wear next time they met. He dared not influence her. But if she wore blue, that meant damnation for him—this world and the next. But red was bliss forever. He used to say to himself, "This is the very last time I'll play these mental pranks. To-day shall decide everything."

And she would be on the platform waiting for his train, smiling and radiant in a blue gown, and he would have to go over it all again.

The fang of some dread or other was always fastening in him. He was full of all kinds of

whimsical fancies—those whims which seem so unimportant, so imbecile and contemptible to the level-minded, and which are so tragic to the morbid. You understand the sort of thing; avoiding the seams of paving stones, taking your fate from the chance expression of the first strange face you meet when you go out of doors, from the color of a horse, the chime of a clock, street cries—anything.

He was very candid when he stood on his trial for his life; he poured out all his troubles, piteously magnifying trifles, blaming the laundress, the blue dress, the clock in the square, the cab outside, for his misfortune. The prison doctor and another examined him. Of course they said he was mad. He may have been. Yet, if he had taken some other set, he would have been as sane as you are to-day.

On the Saturday that he killed Murphy he had delayed going to Dulwich by the usual early afternoon train. He was afraid for one thing—afraid of the poor little cousin's frock. He kept putting it off—the time-table spread out in front of him—from one half-hour to the other. And then, as the afternoon went on, a new terror presented itself.

The Inn began to fill up and grow gay with fellows home early from their offices, and smart shop girls, light-hearted with the weekly half-holiday. He could see them all at the open windows—men in lounging coats and women in cambric bodices.

Pretty faces peeped over flower boxes and round idly flapping curtains. He was afraid to cross the square. Directly the girls saw him they would lean over the window ledges, make funny grimaces, and cough. There would be a perfect chorus of short, dry, mocking coughs. He had a little nervous trick of clearing his throat, and the girls, who were full of chaff, and not over-fond of him because he was so grave and proper, always mimicked him and called him Splutters. They have a nickname for most of the men, but no one but Stapley ever took any notice.

He was afraid to run along that line of little coughs and bantering cries of "Splutters! Splutters!" He looked at one girl immediately opposite, a girl with very fluffy hair and a flashing steel buckle at her waist, and said tragically:

"If that girl coughs and calls out 'Splutters,' I

may as well go and hang myself. I shan't have any luck. It will be all up with me."

So for fear that she would, he waited until dusk, when he thought he would be able to glide out of the Inn unobserved.

While he waited he noticed that there was something unusual about the paneling of the wall—something that he had never observed before. It was near the window, at a part where Orion's leather paper had peeled off. There was a slight but unmistakable difference in the molding. The possibility of a secret cupboard in the wall at once occurred to him. At the same moment he seized it feverishly as an omen, a thing that might make a free man of him once more. The nervous, prompting fiend at his side made him say to himself, as his quivering fingers fiddled at the wood:

"If there should be a secret place behind, then there will be an end to your foolery. It won't matter whether Augusta wears red or blue. Mrs. Worsell may stay away until ten, if she chooses."

He tapped and pushed and pressed and coaxed for a little, and at last the panel moved slightly up-

ward. He put his hand in, felt a bolt, drew it down, and sliding up the panel saw a shallow cupboard. It was full of dust, and empty except for a knife. Ah! *The* knife. The knife which later on was to investigate the very recesses of Murphy's heart. A knife with a chased silver handle and a fine blade.

He held it in his hand, and stood pondering on it and on the shallow hidden place behind the panel. He became conscious of something heavy and still in the air, something waiting, watchful, as his hand gripped that handle. Every little sound in other sets became full of portent. That knife! Who had hidden it there? How had it been used? How long ago was it since a human hand, warm with life, made a blur on that polished, delicately chased handle?

Then he suddenly thought that he would take it down and show it to Kinsman, who was very interested in curios and had some knowledge of them. He gave a last rapid look at the time-table, and decided that he would not go down to Dulwich in time for dinner; he'd have a steak at Gatti's. Kinsman would be interested in the knife. He went down-

stairs as he was, in his old slippers, leaving his door ajar and his rooms in darkness. He had not lighted the lamp because he had been telling himself every half-hour that he would get off to Dulwich.

On the way downstairs he heard a woman's clear strong voice singing "Tatters." It was Sophia's voice, and Sophia was the worst tease of them all. He began to clear his throat directly he thought of her. He would not go downstairs to Kinsman. He would wait until he could find him alone. He would go upstairs and get his hat and bag, and put on his boots and be off to Dulwich. It was evening. Augusta—dear, tender little Augusta—would have on her evening gown—red nun's veiling.

As ill-luck would have it, there was a light under Murphy's door. And Murphy's oak was hospitably back, and the inner door with its gleaming brass knocker seemed to wink an invitation. The very knife in his hand seemed to point to Murphy's door. Well, why not show it to Murphy? He was a bit of a fool, but he would be interested.

So he pulled up, knocked at the door—and you know the rest.

He swore to the very last that he did not do it, that he was merely the agent of the knife—that diabolical knife with the secret history.

Murphy came to the door. His pretty, dissolute face was rather flushed with annoyance. His lips, those pouting, cherry-red lips like a girl's, showed his white, even teeth under his mustache, which was turning white. His sodden brown eyes, half veiled in a web of crow's feet, his smirking, unfailing air of conceit and satisfaction, struck clean-living, over-wrought Stapley as disgusting. The man was an evil clod upon an honest earth. There was the trail of twenty years' intrigue, shuffling, and sham on his features. His eyes were dull with the ruin of many women. He was accursed, heavy, hateful with old secrets, old sins—like the knife. The knife! It claimed kinship. It flew forward to his heart.

That is all. As Murphy shouted out and fell, Stapley went, quick and silent like a panther, up the stairs—quick and silent, with the cunning of a wild animal, just as Barbara, a few weeks later, stole up after him. He softly shut his oak—the oak is al-

ways discreet—and sat shivering, almost breathless, in the dark, listening to the tramp of feet and the anxious buzz of tongues underneath.

When everything was still he stole out and went to Dulwich.

Augusta had a blue gown—it was the Boat Race day—and Stapley was a Cambridge man.

She wore blue constantly afterward. This was one of his plaintive injuries when he babbled out everything at the trial. Blue at the theater that night when his face betrayed him to the vigilant eye of Barbara. Blue when she came to the court to give evidence against him. I wonder if she wears blue when she goes to see him at Broadmoor. Some women would do that in the hope of a cure; though, as you say, they probably don't allow visits at Broadmoor, and a cure wouldn't be of any real help in Stapley's case.

HOPKINS.

ORCHARD was artistic—and talked about it. How tiresome such people are! He split the world into two factions—the artist and the rank, impossible Philistine. Religious bigots talk in the same way—of professing Christians and the unregenerate. I knew a dear old lady once who thought that we had a perfect right to stone some Mohammedan missionaries who came to England.

In the middle of a country walk Orchard would stop, with a deep gulp of admiration, and ask you to admire the view. He raved of autumn tints, apple blossoms, bare boughs. He pretended to like a fog. He painted landscapes—or seascapes, according to your imagination—on the panels of his walls; he stenciled his ceilings, and produced an idealized portrait of his laundress.

He had all the delightful courage and egotism of the amateur. He boasted that he had only once been to the Academy—that temple of mediocrity.

He told you coolly that there was only one English artist of talent—and he was Whiffin. "Never heard of Whiffin! Who is Whiffin? You astonish me. My dear fellow," he would say pityingly, "there is *only* Whiffin."

The others—men whom the ignorant regard as leading—he disposed of glibly. This one was color-blind; he thought that was common knowledge. That one employed a ghost; the fellow could hardly hold a brush himself. Another only painted flesh tints; you can't have a picture all flesh. "My dear fellow, I assure you there is no one but Whiffin. He is the coming man. I'm surprised you don't know his work. Galleries! A man like Whiffin wouldn't exhibit at the galleries."

Orchard was willing to undertake anything—artistic. But his great hobby was house-building. He said that the average architect didn't get the surroundings in harmony. The architect's work only began when the roof was on. He should design the garden, the furniture. He should choose the pictures, the tenants. Every new house ought to be embowered in creepers from the very start.

An old lawn and a clipped yew tree were as essential, more essential, than water pipes. The house must cultivate a ghost. It must have a peacock with a spread tail, a fish pond, full of hoary carp, a raven that would say "nevermore."

He was full of amusing sentiment. He bought his bread at Mackary's, the confectioner's near Bernard Street. It was a queer old shop. Orchard said that it reminded him of Hogarth. Of course he had the greatest possible contempt for Hogarth—but he liked the faint flavor of hoops and beauty patches which hung about Mackary's.

Mackary's business, so it is said above the door, was founded in 1712. The shop window was bow-fronted and had small square panes. Behind these panes were home-baked puffs and Banburys, straight glass bottles full of pink lozenges or sponge fingers. Mackary kept up the traditions of his house. He still made a feature of a special cake said to have been a favorite with Queen Charlotte, and he ignored French pastry.

Miss Mackary kept the books, and wrote poetry after the shutters were up. Mrs. Mackary was

plump, wore a lace cap, and had house property in her own right near Tarn's. They were superior people. Orchard willingly paid a halfpenny more on the half-quartern loaf for the privilege of stepping in with the assured air of a regular customer. He never paid his bill, so that it really made no difference. He used to sit and eat Queen Charlotte's cakes and talk poetry with Miss Mackary. They were all very civil to him—he used to say that nothing demoralized a tradesman more than cash payment.

I don't know why I tell you of Whiffin, of the Mackarys, of Orchard's crazy architectural ideas—they have nothing to do with the story. But they will prove to you what a harmless simpleton he was before he took set 7, before the advent of Hopkins.

Hopkins had the set on the other side of the landing—the right-hand side as you go up. Orchard took the one on the left, he moved there from a ground floor in the other square. Set 7 was cheaper—that baleful set, which held at different times the tragedies of Orion, of Jimmy, of Stapley.

No one had ever seen Hopkins, he was said to be

abroad. Therefore it surprised me when Orchard said casually, with faint annoyance, that his neighbor across the landing was a nuisance; he came in late and made an awful row taking off his boots.

I didn't see Orchard for two or three months after this. It was astounding when next I went up to his rooms to see that Hopkins' name was painted out from the oak on the right-hand set and bracketed with Orchard's name on the left. There it was, as plain as white paint on a black door could make it:

MR. D. B. ORCHARD.

MR. GEOFFREY HOPKINS.

I was surprised, I was also interested; no one had ever seen Hopkins. No one particularly wanted to. Still, as I waited for Orchard to let me in, I had a languid curiosity to know what his co-tenant was like.

Orchard was not looking well. He didn't talk

in his usual airy, sweeping way. There were no new daubs on the wall. When I said, with a look round the room:

"What's this about Hopkins?" he jerked his head toward the bedroom wall, with the cautious remark:

"Don't speak so loudly: he's in the bedroom. Hopkins! Oh! he's all right. We thought it more convenient for him to come here. Great authority on Italian art; subject I'm interested in, as you know."

I didn't know, but I waited on, chatting in rather a strained way, and expecting Hopkins—who never came out of the bedroom. Orchard wasn't conversational that night. He let every subject I started flaccidly drop. He wanted perpetually winding up. His accustomed dogmatic manner had quite deserted him. He didn't bring out his sketchbook. He talked disjointedly of Hopkins. I must come in some other night and look over Hopkins' books on Italian art—thirteenth century principally. It was quite a valuable collection. Hopkins played the violin. That was his fiddle case in the corner. To

hear him play Rubinstein's "Melody in F" was a genuine musical treat.

Other men noticed the change in Orchard. Some said that he was drinking too much beer; others that he was in love with Miss Mackary, who had produced a true degenerate poem. He was not sociable, rarely came out, and took to sporting his oak. He said that he and Hopkins were deep in thirteenth-century Italian art, and had no time for anything else. They were writing a book on it. No one ever saw Hopkins. I, living immediately underneath, never heard his violin.

It was about this time that Orchard took to making me his father confessor. He was always admitting small sins. He came in one night and said earnestly:

"You know we were playing ha'penny nap at Green's last Wednesday. Yes. Well, I didn't put in the pool. It worries me. It was a mean trick, wasn't it? Green kept saying, 'Tit up,' and I—I didn't. Nobody noticed. It was pretty late. I feel ashamed of myself. What can I do?"

"I don't know that you can do anything now," I returned, staring at his anxious face.

"It was a mean, dirty trick," he said despairingly. "I must have cheated you fellows first and last out of two bob. What can I do?"

"You can't do anything. What—what does Hopkins think? How is Hopkins, by the way? Quiet kind of fellow, isn't he? Why don't you bring him down some night?"

"Hopkins! Oh! he's a regular recluse. Steeped to his eyes in Italian art. Plays well, doesn't he?"

"Don't know. I've never heard him."

Orchard looked at me in perplexity.

"Never heard him! That's odd. Why, he was practicing until one this morning."

Another night he came in, his pocket bulging with a book. He sat down in my saddle-bag chair with a groan. His face was clammy with emotion.

"I've—I've stolen this book," he said, bringing out a fat volume with lots of plates. "Couldn't help it for the life of me. What on earth am I to

do? It was on a stall in front—that shop at the corner of the Turnstile. They'll run me in. What do you advise?"

"That's a matter for Hopkins. It's on Italian art, isn't it? The plates look good; no doubt he'll be delighted. All's fair in love and collecting, you know—but the policeman doesn't admit that. I wouldn't do it again."

The third time I happened to go up to him. He answered the door to my knock. For a moment, before he recognized me, there was blank horror on his once carelessly cynical face.

"Hopkins in?" I asked, with a comprehensive movement of the head.

Hopkins was a nuisance, although—perhaps *because*—one never saw him. I had more than once asked Orchard why he had taken in an odd, churlish chap like that, and he had answered, in a short, matter-of-fact way, that it was a perfectly natural selection—they had tastes in common. That night he said, looking very relieved:

"Hopkins is out."

We went into the sitting room. Before he sat

down he added, with a vague, troubled stare about the place:

"Hopkins is a very untidy chap. He leaves his things about."

He made an irritable movement with his hands about the bare, big table in the middle of the room —and only shifted the evening paper. Then he threw himself into the easy chair on the opposite side of the hearth, and I brought out my tobacco pouch.

"I'm going from bad to worse," he broke out, but retaining enough presence of mind to hand me a box of matches and an ash tray.

"I paid something on account of Mackary's bill to-day—with a bad sovereign. But that isn't all. I picked that picture up in a saleroom—put it under my arm and walked away, you know. I believe it is a 'Simms.'" He looked gloatingly at a dark, little oil on the wall. "And I—I stole ten pounds from my young nephew. He gave it me to buy a bicycle —and I've spent every penny."

"These confidences are becoming oppressive," I said. "So long as you restricted yourself to not

putting in the pool, it didn't matter so much. Cheating at cards may be one form of moral protest. Stealing books and pictures is simply an overflow of artistic enthusiasm. But passing bad sovereigns and spending other people's money is reprehensible—to say nothing of its being idiotic. You'll get found out, arrested, ruined. My dear fellow, you are suffering from a severe attack of crime. Crime is merely an infectious disease, like the measles; all sensible people admit that nowadays. Some of us have it; some escape. Occasionally there is an epidemic—look what a run there often is in a certain form of murder. You must see a doctor. It seems to me that you have only developed the attack since Hopkins——"

He stopped me with an eager wave of his unsteady hand.

"Hopkins," he began excitedly, "Hopkins! Good Heavens!"—he stopped, then concluded calmly, with a sort of mechanical cordiality toward the other man—"Hopkins is a very good fellow."

A couple of mornings later I met him in the

square. He had developed a peculiar walk; several men had commented on it. He seemed to be painfully trying to keep step with someone. Occasionally he threw a hunted, conciliating look over his shoulder. Sometimes he started off in a spasmodic trot, and then pulled up as if it were no use to struggle, and tried to keep step again. He meant to pass me with a nod, but I stepped in front of him and took his hand. He looked round, started, stared across the square, and then said:

"Excuse me for not having introduced you to Hopkins. Don't think it strange of him to make off like that. He's a student, you see, very retiring and preoccupied."

"Hopkins!"

"Yes, there he goes—that man with a pronounced stoop, a Norfolk jacket, and a soft hat."

The square was absolutely empty except for Orchard and me. There was no man with a stoop and a Norfolk jacket anywhere in sight; there never had been. Orchard, with his halting, timid walk, had crossed the square alone, had come out of his own doorway alone. Absolutely alone. I had

watched him. I had never taken my eyes off him, from first to last. I took his arm.

"Come over to No. 2 and see Harrowsmith," I entreated. "You don't look well. He'll give you a tonic. Perhaps you're smoking too much—don't believe in a pipe myself. There isn't half so much harm in a mild cigarette."

The square was empty, empty. It was a shock to me. It came so suddenly, it was utterly unexpected—the fact that Hopkins was a mere myth. There possibly was a Hopkins, that absent man, reputed to be abroad, whose name had been painted up on the right-hand set, who had, so I'd heard, been in the habit of sending regularly every quarter day the rent for his empty rooms. But Orchard's Hopkins—the man who played the violin, who was a crank on early Italian art—simply didn't exist. It was then I remembered that when Orchard had said casually, "There's his violin," I had not noticed one, that I had never heard a violin, or a strange voice, or a second pair of feet in the set immediately above my own. I remembered, too, that when Orchard had said, with annoyance, "Hop-

kins is an untidy chap; he leaves his things about," the room had been in perfect order. I had never seen the collection of books on Italian art—the man was a delusion, the product of an excited brain. Orchard was in a bad way. I repeated, "Come up to No. 2 and see Harrowsmith."

He dragged his arm away, gave another keen look across the square, and said impatiently:

"I shall do nothing of the sort. Don't believe in doctors. When I'm hard up for a chronic disease I'll consult one, not before. Hundreds of men have been killed by going to a specialist or by trying to get their lives insured. The specialist shakes his head, the insurance doctor looks grave, and you're done. No! It's a preliminary to going to the undertaker."

This had been one of his many eccentricities in the old extravagant days. I simply said soothingly:

"But you don't go to the undertaker. Someone else has to go—when the time comes. So the bottom's knocked out of your argument. Come on."

He twitched himself away, quite petulantly, like a child, and said:

"I'm off to the country for the day; that will do me more good than doctors' stuff. I shall take train from Baker Street and get down to the valley of the Chess."

I was out late that night. When I came home I noticed a light in Orchard's window. So he was back! I decided not to go up to him. I was half undressed when I heard his oak slam violently, heard heavy, hurried feet coming downstairs. They seemed to come, those feet, half a flight at a time. I knew at once that something was up. My doors were open in a moment. Orchard came toppling into my passage, shutting the oak behind him.

"I've murdered him," he said. "My God! Murdered him. Hopkins!"

"Keep cool. It's all a delusion. There isn't any Hopkins. Your nerves are unstrung——"

"No Hopkins!" the poor fellow interrupted, with a derisive laugh. "You shall hear all about it. No Hopkins! Haven't I lived with him? Hasn't he been tempting me to every devilry? It was Hopkins who made me steal the picture, the

book, the bicycle money; he gave me the bad sovereign for Mackary, he's got a bag full. The man was bothering me. I made a mistake at first to pay him anything on account—you lose their respect directly you make a cash payment. Hopkins! And he was egging me on to—what do you think? To murder you, old man. To murder you, because you've got Rogers' "Italy," with plates after Turner, and he wanted it. The very word Italy is enough for him."

This was startling. I had reason to be grateful that I had pricked the Hopkins bubble in time. Orchard continued, dropping his voice and looking up now and then at the ceiling, and putting his head aside in a listening attitude:

"I dodged him this morning. I went off to Chesham alone, meaning to think the thing out quietly. I'd made up my mind to emigrate, if I could raise the passage money without his suspecting it. And then—well, I might have known—there were steps behind me; his face over my shoulder. He said,—he knows my very thoughts,—

"'Emigration would be the worst thing in the

world for us, dear boy. They want muscles, not art, in a new country.'

"It was more than I could stand. I shoved him into the Chess when he was off his guard. It gave me positive honest enjoyment to see the water eddying over him."

I took his hand and shook it heartily.

"Shoved him into the Chess! You are sure he sank? It is the best bit of news I've heard for a long time. The fellow was a bad lot evidently—what is worse, he was a confounded nuisance. You haven't been the same man since he shared your rooms."

I thought it wiser, just at the moment, not to irritate and excite him by again disputing Hopkins. It was really a remarkable business. The delusion was so perfect, so realistic. From the moment Orchard complained that he could hear Hopkins taking off his boots through the wall, I had never doubted the man's existence—no one had doubted. Yet it was all a delusion. There was no Hopkins. Consequently, Orchard had not cheated at nap, had not betrayed Mackary by a bad sovereign, had not

stolen the book with the fine plates nor the picture that he believed to be a Simms, had not spent his nephew's ten pounds. But he might have murdered me if the delusion had gone on long enough. Hopkins! Whiffin! I began to wonder whether Whiffin really existed or whether he also was a myth. It did not matter much. Orchard said tremulously:

"You haven't heard the worst. I knocked him over into the Chess. I walked into Chesham and had a feed—never enjoyed anything so much in my life, never felt so free and hopeful. I got back to the Inn about ten. As I crossed the square I saw a light move across my window. It struck me as rather odd, but then I remembered that Mrs. Neaves had told me she was coming back to fetch her apron, or a bundle of newspapers she was going to sell at the butcher's, I forget which. It does not matter—nothing matters. I went upstairs. I let myself in with the latchkey. The passage was dark, but there was a steady light under the sitting-room door. No sound. Only the steady yellow light. I went in. As I live, he was sitting there. Hopkins! the man

I had drowned. I staggered to the first chair and sat like a fool, staring at him. He was cutting a portrait out of a ragged pamphlet he bought yesterday at the shop near Tottenham Court Road; he's making an illustrated copy of some book or the other. I forget the title; I forget everything. When he had done he turned round deliberately and looked at me. He didn't seem annoyed in the least. He actually didn't seem conscious of that dip in the Chess. I wanted to ask him how he got out, but I couldn't, to save my soul, speak one word. He was sitting there calmly cutting pictures out of a book. The man I had drowned! I saw him drown. I took devilish good care not to leave the river until I was sure. Yet there he sat. He said:

"'Which train did you come back by? I took the 8.05.'"

"I couldn't bear it any more. I came down to you. What am I to do? How am I to get rid of him? You see, I am absolutely in his power. He owns me. He could hang me if he liked."

"I'll come up and have a talk with him."

We went up to his set together. The sitting room was perfectly dark.

"I expect he's gone to bed," said Orchard.

We looked into the bedroom. It was the only bedroom, but Orchard had put up a second bed, a camp. The sheets on it were dingy, but absolutely unruffled. The bed had never been slept in. He had provided a second washstand—one of those skeleton, brightly painted metal things. It was covered with dust.

"He's gone out," I said encouragingly. "You get to bed and I'll sit up and wait for him to come back."

Orchard undressed as docilely as a child, and stretched himself with a groan of fatigue beneath the sheets. His eyes were wide open—on the empty camp bedstead with the smoothly turned down sheet and the gayly striped blanket which served as a quilt.

"You'd better go back to your own place, old man," he said suddenly. "I shall be all right. Head's been a bit queer, but a sleep will make me all right. I'm very sleepy. It would bother me to

know you were waiting, and there is no necessity. Good-night."

His eyes closed drowsily, then opened, and fixed themselves on that empty bed.

"I want you to go," he said more positively. "I shan't get to sleep until you do."

I went. I thought that he would sleep, and after a good night's rest he would be reasonable. I'd take him to the doctor in the morning. I slept myself. It was past nine next morning when I woke. There was an envelope in the letter box. It was from Orchard. He inclosed the key of his set, and a little note in pencil. So far as I can remember, this is pretty much how it ran:

"Not a bit of good, old fellow. Hopkins won't leave me alone. He was in bed all the time—his own bed, under the window. I wonder you didn't see him. He looked hard at me, and I knew he meant me to send you away. Not a bit of good trying to resist a man like that—a fellow who won't drown! He's making me hang myself; says he's a firm believer in capital punishment. I murdered him, and I must swing for it. You'll find me, if

he leaves me alone, behind the kitchen door. I'm going to bring this note down, with the key, and put it in your letter box. Hope Hopkins won't get it. I should like you to know the truth. Suicide is vulgar—hanging the most popular form of self-effacement. I dislike popularity, as you know. Hopkins reassures me; he says it's only justice. He's reading every word I write. Sell the sticks—if he'll let you—and square up Mackary. Poor Miss M——, she was a little sweet on me. Clever girl! Wasted on a 'good family trade.'"

That was all. I know that the reference to Miss Mackary came last. She's still at the shop in Bernard Street; you must come and have a couple of Queen Charlotte cakes.

I went up. He was hanging, as he said he would be, behind the kitchen door. The door is half glass. As I pushed it back I saw him gently swinging. You won't believe it—I'm not sure that I believe it myself—but I'll swear that as I put the key in the outer door I heard the long, wailing cry of a violin.

. . . . .

A good year afterward I was dining with the

Prays at Kensington. There was another man there—a tiresome fool. The second Mrs. Pray has a knack of collecting stupid people—the sort of stupid people who are small somebodies in their particular line. This man had been abroad collecting rare orchids. His name was Hopkins. It is such a common name that, although I remembered poor Orchard at once, I never thought of asking him if he knew the Inn. Still, I brought the conversation round to it. After dinner, when Mrs. Pray had left us, I said to Pray:

"There is a man called Jackson in your old set. And Kinsman's gone—to the bad some say."

Hopkins pricked up his ears.

"You are talking of the Inn," he said, and mentioned my number. "Odd thing! I have a set in that very house. Top floor, right-hand side as you go up the stairs. Of course you've seen my name—Hopkins."

I could only look at him and nod my head. He filled his glass and carefully cut the end of a cigar.

He was the most commonplace, prosperous-looking man you can possibly imagine. I thought of

Orchard's Hopkins—"Decided stoop, Norfolk jacket, and soft hat." This man's shoulders were well squared back and ingeniously padded by his tailor. He was the sort of man who would never wear a Norfolk jacket in town; a man who would go to spend Sunday in the country in a black diagonal coat, and take his top hat with him in case of emergency. I looked at him, looked into his dull, bulging eyes. Eyes without depth, without secrets, without soul—just eyes! hard, glassy things put for purely practical purposes into his head! It was clearly superfluous to ask him if he took an interest in Italian art or played the violin.

"Perhaps you can explain," he continued. "I went to the Inn the week before last. They've painted my name out on the door of the right-hand set and stuck it on the left-hand set with another man's. I took his name—wait a moment."

He brought out a fat notebook—he was the kind of accurate dullard who would be sure to take notes.

"D. B. ORCHARD. That's it. Now, who is he? *I* couldn't find out. I went and beat up the man who does most of the painting, and he didn't

know. It was a piece of confounded impudence. It may have done me some injury—I use the place as a business address. If it was a practical joke, then it was a very foolish one, and in precious bad taste."

He began to look swollen and angry; looked at me as if he half suspected that I'd a hand in it. No doubt I looked guilty.

"Who is D. B. Orchard?" he persisted, in the puffy, thick-throated way of the pompous man. "How is one to get at the fellow? I hammered at the door for the best part of half an hour. D. B. Orchard!" He laughed ironically. "I'd teach him not to play stupid jokes on me. I'd have him understand, sir, that Geoffrey Hopkins is not a man to be played with."

Geoffrey Hopkins! I felt my very lips grow white. I must have looked like some foolish, anæmic girl.

"How is one to get at him? I might claim damages." He brought his broad, hairy fist down vigorously on the shining table. Pray, looking from one to the other—my quivering countenance

and the inflamed features of the man Hopkins—was evidently uncomfortable.

I looked at that man. Geoffrey Hopkins! I could have taken that flabby body in my grip and shaken it for all that it had made poor Orchard suffer. And yet! *Was* this the man? Instinct told me, common sense told me, that it was not.

"D. B. Orchard is dead," I said curtly at last; then, with a savage laugh and a terror-stricken glance at the coarse face, added, "You can't get at him. He's out of your reach, poor devil, at last."

I didn't know; I don't know, now—how can one be sure! Of course he wasn't Orchard's Hopkins. But! What an affair!

Tell him? No. I saw him look at me with disgust and suspicion—no doubt he thought I was a little drunk. No doubt he went away and told his friends that I wasn't quite a gentleman. That sort of man talks like that.

When we were alone I told the whole story to Pray. But he, with a pathetic droop of his mouth and a mystic flicker in eyes that were hard with success, said—glancing at the door—that such sub-

jects didn't interest him. He hated to dabble on the edge of the infinite—he'd had enough. He seemed to sigh as he lighted his pipe.

I haven't seen Hopkins since. If ever I see him again I shan't tell him—he's too commonplace.

THE END.

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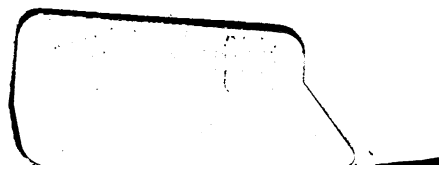
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